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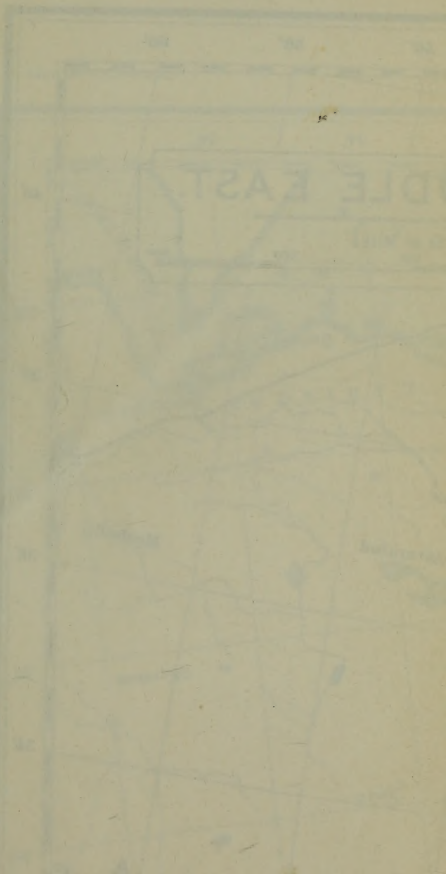

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Kut al Amara
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Najaf
Amara
Qal'a Salih
Ezra's Tomb
Samawa
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BASED ON OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS

THE CAMPAIGN IN MESOPOTAMIA

1914-1918.

Compiled at the request of the Government of India,
under the direction of the Historical Section
of the Committee of Imperial Defence,

BY

BRIG.-GEN. F. J. MOBERLY, C.B., C.S.I., D.S.O., p.s.c.

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PREFACE

AS in the case of the first volume, this narrative is based mainly on official documents, from which, to obviate controversy, extracts have frequently been given at length.

Practically all the official records of the force in Kut dealing with the operations at Ctesiphon, the subsequent retreat and the siege, were destroyed before the surrender ; and the author has consequently had to rely to a great extent on private accounts and on the assistance that many officers have been good enough to render him from their recollection of events.

In his account of the relief operations, the author has received considerable assistance from the different commanders or their staff officers, and this has enabled him to supplement the information in the official records by giving in many cases these officers' own reasons for their action. The expression of these must not, however, be taken as criticism by the author, who has endeavoured to present an impartial narrative.

This volume is mainly a recital of a series of British misfortunes ; and in many other respects the operations differed from those of earlier days. The enemy's fighting forces were more, and those of the British less, efficient ; their respective armament and equipment were somewhat improved but, generally speaking, those of the British—though often inadequate—were superior ; and their long and imperfect lines of communication were a constant source of difficulty to both sides. The mirage-ridden and featureless plain of the Tigris valley, with its lack or excess of water, its physical difficulties enhanced by the vagaries of weather and its extremes of climate, proved throughout a most difficult theatre to operate in, and to the British it appeared that its eccentricities of nature militated generally more to their disadvantage than to that of the enemy.

The author desires to take this opportunity of expressing his grateful acknowledgments to the many individuals, officers and officials, who have been so good as to assist him by the loan of private papers, by checking his drafts, by researches among records, and in other ways ; to the headquarters of the Royal Air Force in Mesopotamia, to T. A. Chalmers, Esq., C.S.I.,

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and to Lieut.-Colonel G. B. Power, C.I.E., M.C., for photographs reproduced in this volume ; to many in the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence ; and especially to his assistant, Colonel F. E. G. Talbot.

The spelling of names is again according to the ruling of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names of the Royal Geographical Society.

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" From Private to Field-Marshal." Field-Marshal Sir W. Robertson.

" Vom Balkan nach Baghdad." Major-General von Gleich.

" Mit Feldmarschall von der Goltz Pascha in Mesopotamien und Persien." Oberstleutnant Hans von Kiesling.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DECISION TO ADVANCE TO BAGHDAD.

THE reasons which led to the despatch of the British expeditionary force to Mesopotamia have been detailed in Volume I. Our essential interests at the head of the Persian Gulf and the Turco-German power to organise a *Jahad* which might extend from Arabia to the Indus had been the main compelling factors. The fact that before this necessity arose India had already despatched (or arranged to despatch) half her field army westward to meet the Empire's call, and the widely held opinion that the Arabs in Mesopotamia were ready to rise and throw off the Turkish yoke, had limited the size of the force despatched; and had also made it inadvisable to lay down a definite policy to govern the operations beyond the occupation of Basra. For in those early stages it was impossible to foretell how the many turbulent and uncertain populations affected might act; or whether the defensive requirements of India could be adequately fulfilled by operations at a distance from her frontiers.

The occupation of Basra brought us no nearer a solution. The advance to Baghdad suggested in November 1914 was at that time obviously beyond our military capacity and offered no strategical advantage; and prudence dictated the consolidation of our position at Basra while awaiting the further development of events. Whether an immediate advance on our part to Amara and Nasiriya would have brought about the expected rising of Arabs or have assured us of their co-operation is a matter of controversy. But it is certain that at that stage India would have found it difficult and dangerous to furnish the reinforcements necessary for such an advance.

The Turkish reply to our operations—a wide encircling counter-offensive with the object of driving us into the sea—obliged us in the spring of 1915 to strengthen our forces in Mesopotamia and disclosed the dangers of our position as well as the futility of looking for Arab co-operation. To render the situation secure a further advance seemed imperative. Our decisive success in beating off the Turkish attack and the ineptitude and inefficiency of the enemy's forces enabled us to occupy Amara and Nasiriya in the face of great physical and climatic difficulties and perhaps led us rather to underestimate the powers of Turkish opposition.

But the effort had, in a military sense, completely exhausted India for the time being. With a supposed field army capacity of 7 infantry divisions and 5 cavalry brigades, she had in the first six months of the war mobilised 10 infantry divisions and 8 cavalry brigades*; and could do no more without assistance from the United Kingdom. But owing to more urgent demands elsewhere the United Kingdom could not give this assistance; and had not yet properly awakened herself to the necessity of a comprehensive reorganisation of her imperial resources for the effort required of her. It is, therefore, scarcely to be wondered at that India—faced by dangers from without, distracted by difficulties and dissension within, and depleted of military protection to what appeared a dangerous extent—had also not so awakened and was loth to add further to the troubles of the mother country by insistent demands for the wherewithal to expand her own national resources. As it was, however, she placed clearly before H.M. Government her inability to find further forces for Mesopotamia, and this inability was as clearly recognised by H.M. Ministers.

Nevertheless it was found possible to accede to, and concur in, the proposal of the military commander in Mesopotamia to make a still further advance in order to consolidate his position by the occupation of Kut al Amara. Thanks to the skill and gallantry of British and Indian officers and men, and partly also to the comparatively low fighting efficiency of the Turkish forces, success once more attended our effort; and it was only by the sudden fall of the water in the Tigris that we failed to obtain more decisive results.

The Turco-German alliance had as yet experienced no great or striking success in attempts to raise the Mahomedan peoples of Western Asia against the British. In Arabia the *Jahad* had on the whole attained little effect, though its few adherents had caused us some temporary embarrassment. In Persia enemy agents had overrun the country and, forming mercenary bands, had caused considerable unrest and had forced some British and Russian consular officials to leave their districts. These enemy agents were still operating and great efforts were being made to force Persia into the war on the side of the Turks; and in face of the attitude of the Persian Government the issue was still uncertain. A Turco-German mission to the Amir of Afghanistan to induce him to declare war against India had arrived in Kabul; and although the

* Of these, 7 infantry divisions and 7 cavalry brigades had been despatched overseas.

Amir was temporising with them, it seemed likely that, if the enemy should succeed in bringing Persia into the war on their side or in sending even small bodies of troops through Persia into Afghanistan, the Amir would be unable to restrain the extremist sections of his people and might be forced into hostilities. In this eventuality a rising of the frontier tribes would certainly take place and the revolutionary and disorderly elements in India itself would also certainly take advantage of the opportunity to foment internal risings. In consequence, the situation in Persia had assumed for the time being considerable importance ; and India had no troops to spare for operations outside her borders. Certain precautionary action had been taken by Great Britain on the shores of the Persian Gulf and on the borders of Baluchistan and Sistan, and by Russia in North Persia and in Khurasan, but these had not proved sufficient.*

Hitherto the policy in Mesopotamia laid down by H.M. Government, though consistently cautious, had met with striking success. It is, therefore, not surprising that the revival, at this stage, of the proposal to advance to Baghdad at once engaged serious attention.

Although the suggestion had been definitely vetoed in November 1914, the possibility that such an advance might have to be undertaken had been borne in mind by the authorities in India. It was known that the political authorities in England regarded the occupation by us of Baghdad as highly desirable ; and consequently Sir John Nixon had been instructed in March 1915 by the Commander-in-Chief in India, as a precautionary measure, to draw out a plan for this advance. Moreover, as explained in the preceding volume,† in June 1915 it had appeared to the General Staff in India that the Russian advance into Armenia, combined with the Turkish preoccupation in the Dardanelles, had brought about a situation that rendered an advance to Baghdad a more feasible proposition. In August 1915, Sir John Nixon had suggested an advance to Baghdad as the best way of counteracting unrest in Persia;‡ and in September, Lord Hardinge had written to Mr. Chamberlain pointing out the great effect in the East which the capture by

* Oberstleutnant Hans von Kiesling in " Mit Feldmarschall von der Goltz Pascha in Mesopotamien und Persien " shows that Goltz's instructions were to expel the Russians and British from Persia, raise a Persian army, and organise a confederation of Turkey, Persia and Afghanistan to expel the British from Mesopotamia and invade India.

† Volume I., Chapter XI.

‡ Volume I., Chapter XII.

us of Baghdad would have;* although he modified this opinion by declining to recommend such a plan unless reinforcements could be sent to Mesopotamia from France or Egypt.

On the 9th September, the Commander-in-Chief in India received from General Nixon a "Memorandum on an advance to Baghdad" dated 30th August.† In this, General Nixon, after referring to the military, political and commercial importance of occupying Baghdad, estimated the Turkish strength in Lower Mesopotamia as not exceeding 10,200 men. He did not anticipate the early approach of Turkish reinforcements on any considerable scale. He estimated that such reinforcements, consisting of divisions or army corps, could not be moved into Mesopotamia from Syria or Armenia and brought into action anywhere near Baghdad in less than two months from the date of despatch; and that previous to their arrival he would receive at least one month's notice of their approach.

The 6th Division would shortly be ready to advance on Kut. If General Townshend gained a crushing victory there, our victorious troops might be able to press on to Baghdad at the heels of the disorganised enemy without encountering serious opposition. If the Turks retired in good order after defeat at Kut, it was essential to pursue them and give them no time to recuperate; and in this case the retreat might degenerate into a rout and leave Baghdad open to our advance. If the Turks retired without making a stand at Kut, a prompt British advance beyond Kut would be militarily desirable and this might of itself open the road to Baghdad; though it was possible that the Turks might make a stand at Ctesiphon, eighteen miles from Baghdad, where a position had been entrenched.

If, after defeating the Turks and consolidating our position at Kut, we were at some later date to advance against Baghdad, the difficulty of the operation would depend on the length of time given to the enemy for recuperation, reinforcement and elaboration of his defences. "In short, to advance against Baghdad when it is directly covered by a prepared enemy will certainly entail another severe engagement or series of engagements, whereas, if the enemy is beaten a hundred miles in advance of Baghdad, the 6th Division might be able in certain circumstances to enter that city practically unopposed, provided that the pursuit of the enemy is carried out vigorously."

* Volume I., Chapter XII.

† General Nixon had so far not complied with his instructions to submit a plan for the advance and he never did so. This paper was not a plan in the military sense of the word, but was rather an "appreciation."

General Nixon concluded by saying that, although in favourable circumstances one division might take Baghdad, it would require two divisions to hold that place for the duration of the war. In order to be able to concentrate two divisions in Baghdad, he would require reinforcement by one cavalry and two infantry brigades.

After reading General Nixon's memorandum, the Commander-in-Chief in India—who a few days previously had warned General Nixon not to undertake operations above Kut without reference to India*—minuted: "Unless we can get back troops from France, Egypt or elsewhere, I fear that Baghdad, invaluable as its capture would be, is out of the question." In this respect he and Lord Hardinge were in complete accord. Moreover, although the records show that from this time till the 29th September the General Staff in India realised that General Nixon wished, in the event of victory at Kut, to be allowed to push on in pursuit of the Turks in the hope of capturing Baghdad, they fully expected that he would first obtain permission to do so from India. On the other hand, General Nixon complained to the Mesopotamia Commission that he received no indication of Government policy until the 6th October, and that if he had done so General Townshend would not have advanced so far after the battle of Kut. It is thus evident that he had misunderstood the warning sent him by the Commander-in-Chief, alluded to above.

After the victory of Kut, as related in the last chapter of Volume I., General Townshend pressed on in pursuit up the Tigris. On the 1st October, General Nixon telegraphed to India to the following effect :† the enemy was retreating up the Tigris in orderly fashion and was possibly making for the position at Ctesiphon which had been under preparation since June; his strength was estimated at six squadrons cavalry, possibly 500 camelry, 4,000 infantry and about 20 guns; beyond a possible 1,500 infantry and two guns from the Euphrates line he was unlikely to receive any material reinforcement ;‡ he had suffered heavily on the 28th September, his *moral* could not be very high; General Townshend was in pursuit, but the enemy had got about forty-eight hours start owing to the delays caused by the difficult navigation; and rather than discontinue the pursuit General Nixon was pressing on his gunboats and

* On 6th September: see Volume I., Chapter XII.

† This telegram he did not repeat to the India Office; he sent a copy to General Townshend.

‡ In his book General Townshend says that he did not agree with this opinion.

ships to prevent the enemy making a further stand; for he considered that a pursuit, though unavoidably slow, would have a demoralising effect upon the enemy and a correspondingly favourable effect on the local political situation.

On the 3rd October, General Nixon wired that there was no longer any chance of surprising or stampeding the retreating enemy, who would probably stand and fight at Ctesiphon. But he considered that he was strong enough to open the road to Baghdad which, from a military point of view, it was highly desirable to do; so that with this intention he proposed to concentrate at Aziziya.

On the same day, some telegraphic correspondence passed between General Townshend (on board a river steamer pursuing up the Tigris) and General Nixon's headquarters at Kut. General Townshend stated *inter alia*: ". . . . you will see . . . . that there is no more chance of breaking up the retreating Turkish force, which by now is established in position at Ctesiphon . . . . They have also probably been reinforced from Baghdad . . . . If I may be allowed to express an opinion I should say that our object up to the battle of Kut has been the consolidation of the Basra *vilayet* and occupation of the strategic position of Kut . . . . If Government does not consider that the occupation of Baghdad is yet politically advisable owing to doubt of the Dardanelles situation and consequent possibility of any small force we might put into Baghdad being driven out again by superior forces from Anatolia, and so obliged to retreat along an extremely long line of communications infested by hostile or semi-hostile, and on news of retreat actively hostile, Arabs, then we should on all military grounds occupy ourselves with consolidating our position at Kut. The plan of entering Baghdad on the heels of a retreating and disordered force was upset by the sudden fall of water rendering our progress in ships of great difficulty and toil and extremely slow. On the other hand, if Government desire to occupy Baghdad then I am of opinion that methodical advance from Kut by road by two divisions or one army corps, or one division closely supported by another entire, exclusive of line of communication troops . . . . is absolutely necessary unless great risk is to be incurred. It is absolutely impossible to send laden ships up river now."

The above telegram was seen by General Nixon and the following reply was sent by his chief staff officer to General Townshend. " Your (telegram) . . . . does not seem to take into account the appreciation of the situation in my (telegram)

. . . . which I sent you last night * . . . . The Turkish force there (i.e., at Ctesiphon) is inferior in numbers and *moral* to the force you successfully defeated at Kut and the position is not nearly so strong. It is the Army Commander's intention to open the way to Baghdad, as he understands another division will be sent here from France † and he would like to know your plan for effecting this object with the force you had at Kut *plus* probably four squadrons and a R.H.A. battery . . . ."

This telegram was answered on the same day by General Townshend. In a telegram of the 7th April 1916, sent from Kut, General Townshend subsequently explained his attitude at this date towards General Nixon's proposal. He considered that a grave risk was being run in continuing the advance on Baghdad with only his weak division ; and he was of opinion that the Turks would undoubtedly reinforce Mesopotamia to save Baghdad. Although it was difficult for him as a subordinate commander to give his opinions unasked to the Army Commander, he felt that it was his absolute duty to indicate the risk to General Nixon. He considered that he had done this, and that as a subordinate commander he could not do more. His conscience was clear and he was ready to undertake any order given to him. In his book General Townshend says that he thought further argument useless, as General Nixon evidently considered General Townshend's force sufficient and therefore meant to disregard the warning. He also says that he did not think that there was any chance of the divisions from France being in Mesopotamia in time. His reply of the 3rd October ran as follows : " . . . . I had taken into account the appreciation of the situation in your telegram . . . . My information I consider, points to different estimate of the hostile force being concentrated at Ctesiphon . . . . you did not mention the arrival of a division from France and that makes all the difference in your appreciation. I will wire my plan to-morrow morning as it requires some careful thought . . . ."

The receipt at the India Office of General Nixon's telegram of the 3rd October, stating that he proposed to concentrate at Aziziya with the intention of opening the road to Baghdad, forced the authorities in England to consider immediately the question of an advance to Baghdad.

On the 4th October, and before he had seen General Nixon's telegram, General Barrow at the India Office had written a

* This was the telegram of the 1st October sent to India, see *ante*, p. 5.

† Apparently he had received private information concerning this, as no official intimation to this effect by this date can be traced in the records.

minute on an advance to Baghdad, as he anticipated that the question would be revived owing to the victory at Kut. He advocated a policy of caution and prompt orders to General Nixon not to advance; for though it was possible, he said, that General Nixon's present force was strong enough to expel the Turks from Baghdad, he did not consider that the force was strong enough to hold it against possible Turkish attacks later on and an evacuation then by the British might have disastrous political effects. He was of opinion that it would be incurring unjustifiable risks to go to Baghdad unless we could reinforce General Nixon with a complete division and one or two cavalry regiments.

By this date Mr. Chamberlain had received Lord Hardinge's private letter of the 10th September, in which the Viceroy had advocated the formation in Egypt of a reserve provided by the Indian divisions from France; and in which he had pointed out the decrease in India's military strength, the growth in India's responsibilities, and how improvisation in India had practically reached its limits; he had also explained that the situation in India was slowly deteriorating, and as it might at any moment become critical it gave cause for anxiety as to the future. Lord Hardinge's review of the situation caused Mr. Chamberlain considerable apprehension. It indicated more anxiety on the Viceroy's part than Mr. Chamberlain had been led to expect. Moreover, it reached him at a time when sudden changes and developments in the European situation were an additional disturbing influence.

On the 4th October, Mr. Chamberlain wired officially to India: ". . . . I shall be glad to know what Nixon's present intentions are, as if, owing to navigation troubles, there is no probability of catching and smashing the retreating enemy, there is no object in continuing the pursuit . . . ." The telegram went on to say that the previous orders as to a cautious policy in Mesopotamia still held good, "subject to course of events at Baghdad and elsewhere and to the recommendations you now make;" and concluded by asking for an estimate of the enemy's strength in Mesopotamia. Mr. Chamberlain supplemented this official telegram with a private one to Lord Hardinge in which he said that the latter's private letter of the 10th September seemed to render it imperative to stop General Nixon's further advance; and he asked for an early communication of the Viceroy's views.

Mr. Chamberlain's views at this period were further expressed in his weekly private letter of the 7th October. It was, he

considered, hardly possible to exaggerate the political advantages of a British capture of Baghdad, while the military advantages *vis-à-vis* Persia and the German activities there were not to be underrated. But the India Office were of opinion that a reinforcement of another division was necessary if General Nixon was to hold Baghdad. He had reported the position to the Cabinet and an Inter-Departmental conference to consider the matter was assembling that afternoon. Lord Kitchener was averse to giving up a division owing to the demands elsewhere; and the change in the Balkan situation, owing to the fall of M. Venizelos* and the political certainty that Bulgaria was joining the Central Powers, would increase the demands for troops.

On the 4th October, General Nixon telegraphed to India asking—with reference to his suggestion to open, by another general action, the road to Baghdad—whether his force was to be reinforced by a division from France in order that his position at Baghdad might be maintained. The effect of his occupation of Baghdad would be more than nullified, he said, if subsequent events compelled him to retreat for lack of reinforcements.

On the 5th, Mr. Chamberlain wired privately to Lord Hardinge informing him that the Cabinet had appointed a Committee representing the War Office, Admiralty, Foreign and India Offices to consider in all its aspects the possibility and policy of an advance to Baghdad.† He continued "Political reasons were thought to make occupation desirable as isolating Germans in Persia, if forces available are sufficient to take and hold the place . . . . Kitchener can hold out no hope of reinforcements from Europe or Egypt. Let me know your views."

On the same day, the Chief of the General Staff, India, submitted a lengthy appreciation to the Commander-in-Chief. Sir Percy Lake estimated the total Turkish forces in Mesopotamia at about 7,500 infantry, 600 sabres and 28 guns, while General Nixon's force, at and above Kut, amounted to about

* The Greek Premier.

† To the Mesopotamia Commission, Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Hardinge both justified recourse to the use of, so called, private telegrams on the ground that in time of war urgency and secrecy were of paramount importance. The Commission did not altogether accept this justification. Mr. Chamberlain told the House of Commons that he was not aware that such private telegrams were considered both in India and the India Office as the personal property of the official who sent or received them and could be carried away by him when he left. Otherwise he would have placed a number of these telegrams on record officially.

7 squadrons, 13 battalions and 28 guns. General Nixon considered his force sufficient to open the road to Baghdad, but required another division to hold it against possible future attacks. On the 30th August, General Nixon had considered that he would receive at least one month's notice of the approach of any considerable Turkish reinforcements; but since then conditions in the Balkans and the Dardanelles had altered and, considered with the advent of winter, would probably allow the Turks to detach troops for Mesopotamia.

The possession of Baghdad would, Sir Percy Lake said, not only deprive the Turks of a place of concentration and of a well equipped base, but would place us in a good position to defeat them in detail as they moved down the rivers from Asia Minor or Syria. We should also deprive the Turks of steamers, material and resources, increase our prestige, offset possible failure in the Dardanelles, and interfere seriously, if not completely, with enemy communications with Persia and Afghanistan. The latter consideration was specially important in view of the German plans for raising Afghanistan and the North-West Frontier tribes. Conditions in India and on the frontier rendered the permanent despatch of more infantry at the moment an uncertain measure, and the only sure source in sight of a reinforcement of one division was from France.

The real answer, concluded Sir Percy Lake, to General Nixon's proposal to open the road to Baghdad depended on the readiness of the War Office to despatch an Indian division from France. Until we had the assurance that a division would be despatched to Mesopotamia before, say, the end of October, we could not give General Nixon permission to advance; but it would be sound not to interfere with his concentration at Aziziya.

After reading the above, the Commander-in-Chief submitted two telegrams—one to General Nixon and one to the India Office—to the Viceroy for approval. Lord Hardinge accepted both with slight modifications. That to General Nixon was despatched the same day—5th October. It repeated the Secretary of State's telegram of the 4th asking General Nixon's intentions, and continued: "No reinforcements can at present be spared from India, so that unless the Secretary of State can arrange for the despatch of an Indian division from France you cannot advance on Baghdad. This being so, we see no advantage in an immediate forward concentration at Aziziya which can be of no advantage to us except as a step towards

Baghdad. Chief considers you should not advance in strength beyond Kut al Amara until it is certain that we may expect reinforcements from France, which we consider very doubtful."*

The telegram to the India Office was despatched on the 6th October. It repeated General Nixon's telegram of the 4th enquiring if he was to be reinforced by a division from France, and it expressed concurrence in General Nixon's opinion regarding the bad effect of a subsequent forced withdrawal from Baghdad. After suggesting that the time was opportune for removing the Indian divisions from France, the telegram continued: "In view of German activities in Persia, increasing pressure on Afghanistan, and the aspect in the Balkans and the Dardanelles, we hold that the capture of Baghdad would have such an effect in the Near East and offers such important political and strategical advantages as to justify movement, but to do this at least an additional division would be required. Otherwise we do not propose to allow him (Nixon) to go beyond Kut al Amara . . . ." The telegram concluded with an estimate of the Turkish strength in Mesopotamia, which was calculated at a total of 8,500 rifles, 600 sabres and 28 guns.

On the same day—6th October—Lord Hardinge wired privately to Mr. Chamberlain: "Your private telegram of 4th instant. Nixon's plans. Please see official telegram of to-day. Orders were telegraphed yesterday to Nixon to stop further advance. Present situation is as follows: Nixon with forces at his disposal could without much difficulty capture Baghdad and at the same time take or destroy Turkish steamers and other boats, thus practically preventing any further attacks downstream. But he could not remain there exposed to attack by Turkish reinforcements from Mosul or Aleppo without himself being reinforced by one division of troops. It would be a grave political error to advance to Baghdad and to retire later under pressure from the Turks. Consequently, unless it be possible to reinforce Nixon from elsewhere other than India, he must remain at Kut al Amara. On the other hand, from a political point of view, capture of Baghdad would create an immense impression in Middle East, especially in Persia, Afghanistan and on our frontier, and would counteract unfortunate impression created by want of success in Dardanelles. It would also isolate German parties in Persia, probably produce pacifying effect in that country and frustrate German plan of raising Afghanistan and the tribes, while impression throughout Arabia would be striking. In India effect would be

* The telegram issued as usual from the Chief of the General Staff.

undoubtedly good. These are considerations to which I attach great importance, but I put them forward to be weighed by you and H.M. Government, for I fully realise that it is for H.M. Government to decide where and how our forces can be used with the best possible effect."

On the 6th October, General Nixon telegraphed as follows to India and the India Office, in reply to India's telegram of the 5th: "Navigation difficulties have been overcome by lightening ships and utilising them for towing laden barges and by marching troops with land transport . . . . Enemy appears to be no longer retreating but has occupied Ctesiphon position and thereby constitutes a threat to us. Our information is that his troops, especially those locally recruited, have been much demoralised by defeat at Kut al Amara in a position which they considered impregnable. They are now so near Baghdad that Nur-ud-Din will have difficulty in making a determined stand with men who are close to their homes and wish to desert. I consider therefore that there is every probability of catching and smashing the enemy at Ctesiphon as soon as 6th Division has fully concentrated at Aziziya and been reinforced by drafts and cavalry now on their way from Basra. If on the other hand we retire from Aziziya to Kut the enemy and whole tribes will place their own construction on such a movement . . . . The Arab tribes now regard us as irresistible and have been coming in from all directions to make submission, but if we withdraw will probably behave as before. It is my view that we have in front of us a shaken enemy who has lost thirteen guns and is deficient of ammunition and for military reaons it is clearly desirable to smash him while we can. He has taken refuge in a position where we can manoeuvre and I hope destroy him. I see nothing which would justify letting slip such an opportunity. From a military point of view Baghdad is a focus of Turkish lines of advance and a large supply centre of which in our interests it is vital to deprive enemy and this quite apart from any political effect its occupation might have."

On the 7th October, in view of Mr. Chamberlain's private wire of the 5th to Lord Hardinge saying that Lord Kitchener could hold out no hope of reinforcements from Europe or Egypt, Sir Beauchamp Duff sent General Nixon a telegram in the following terms: "Personal. We know privately that the question of your advancing on Baghdad is before the Cabinet at Home who have appointed a committee to deal with the question. We are also now aware that in no circumstances can we expect to

receive troops from Europe or Egypt. In these circumstances I think you should as far as possible refrain from committing yourself to an advance till decision of the Cabinet is known to you."

On the same day Sir Beauchamp Duff submitted to Lord Hardinge a draft reply which he proposed the Viceroy should send in answer to Mr. Chamberlain's private telegram of the 5th October. It ran as follows: "I have consulted the Commander-in-Chief who has no doubt that as things stand at present we could capture Baghdad, but that our available troops would not be sufficient to hold it should the Turks mass troops for a counter-attack and that the effect of entering Baghdad and subsequently having to retire would be disastrous. Moreover, he doubts whether in the present state of the river, combined with our present insufficient number of light-draught steamers, we could adequately supply our troops there. As a military operation, therefore, he holds that to occupy Baghdad with our present forces would be most unwise," and the draft concluded with various reasons in justification of this contention.

Lord Hardinge did not accept this draft but sent another telegram (given below). Sir Beauchamp Duff in his evidence before the Mesopotamia Commission said that when he submitted this draft he had not seen nor been consulted about the private telegram which Lord Hardinge had already sent Mr. Chamberlain on the 6th in reply to the latter's telegram of the 4th. But Sir Beauchamp Duff attributed, he said, the non-acceptance of this draft to what Lord Hardinge had said in his telegram of the 6th which already covered much of the subject matter. The important difference lay in the mention of the insufficient number of light-draught steamers and the apprehended difficulty of supplying the force adequately at Baghdad. When questioned on this point by the Mesopotamia Commission, Lord Hardinge said that if Sir Beauchamp Duff had made a special point of it, his draft would have been sent with the Viceroy's comments upon it.

The actual telegram despatched (on the 7th) ran as follows: "Private. Your private telegram of the 5th instant. Sir John Nixon's plans. Commander-in-Chief agrees with view contained in my private telegram of yesterday that it would be unwise to occupy Baghdad with our present forces* . . . ."

Lord Hardinge's attitude towards the question of an advance

* The remainder of the telegram dealt with a totally different subject which is not relevant.

on Baghdad at this time is further disclosed in his private weekly letter of the 8th October to Mr. Chamberlain, in which he said that unless they could get Indian troops from Egypt his own feeling was that we should remain at Kut, although he knew that the military authorities* were thirsting to push on and he fully realised the immense political effect the capture of Baghdad would have in the Middle East. He was anxious about the situation on the Indian frontier and in Burma and a coming Mahomedan festival on the 19th October (Bakr Id) might show unwelcome developments. In Afghanistan the Amir appeared to be adopting a correct attitude towards the German mission, but he had to face internal intrigues directed at forcing him to declare a *Jahad*; and Lord Hardinge considered it most important to avoid a rupture with the Persian Government, as if Persia joined Turkey he did not see how the Amir could hold out.

On the 8th October General Nixon replied to Sir Beauchamp Duff's personal wire of the 7th: "Attitude of Turks being as it is, their sending troops back towards us obliges me for military reasons to be strong in front . . . . We are within fifty miles of Baghdad and whether, in event of Turks in course of time sending large forces against us, we get reinforcements or not, our most favourable position to hold what we have won is Baghdad rather than below it. But unless forced by the enemy's action to take steps I am not committing myself."

The same day Mr. Chamberlain wired direct to General Nixon, repeating the telegram to India: "Very urgent. With what addition to your present force are you confident that you can both occupy and hold Baghdad. Reply direct and repeat reply to Government of India." At the same time, Mr. Chamberlain wired privately to Lord Hardinge: "Reference my telegram of to-day to Nixon repeated to you. Cabinet are so impressed with great political and military advantages of occupation of Baghdad that we shall make every effort to supply necessary force. We do not wish to attempt it with insufficient forces. Are you satisfied that one division is sufficient?"

The reasons which led to the despatch of these two telegrams are clearly shown in Mr. Chamberlain's private letter of the 8th October to Lord Hardinge.† The Cabinet were greatly impressed by the review of the situation in Lord Hardinge's and General Nixon's telegrams and they authorised the despatch

* It is doubtful if this term was meant to include Sir Beauchamp Duff.
† This reached Lord Hardinge about 4th November.

of the two telegrams quoted.* It seemed to them that an opportunity was within our grasp for a great success such as we had not yet achieved in any quarter and the political (and even military) advantages which would follow from it throughout the East could not easily be overrated. This consideration was rendered even more important by the imminent intervention of Bulgaria in the war, by the renewed attack on Serbia by Austro-German forces, and by the peril in which these developments would place our forces in Gallipoli, where progress was at a standstill and where the position might even become untenable if the Austro-German attack on Serbia should open the way for the passage of munitions to the Turks. All this strengthened the case for taking full advantage of Nixon's victorious campaign by capturing and holding Baghdad. General Nixon had asked for one additional division, but the Viceroy's telegram of the 6th had said " at least an additional division." The Cabinet desired to know what number of troops would make India and General Nixon confident of success. If necessary, they were prepared to send two divisions sooner than lose the opportunity and sooner than run any undue risk in pursuing it. But men were none too plentiful and they did not wish to send more than were required.

It should be explained that though Mr. Chamberlain was not a member of the War Committee of the Cabinet, which at this time was known as the " Dardanelles Committee," he was very anxious from what he knew of the situation in the Dardanelles and of the consequent disquieting conditions in Egypt; and the Prime Minister had arranged to keep him informed if events in that theatre took a turn which would affect matters in the Far East, so that Mr. Chamberlain could warn Lord Hardinge.

General Nixon answered Mr. Chamberlain's wire on the same day—the 8th; he said: " . . . . I am confident that I can beat Nur-ud-Din and occupy Baghdad without any addition to my present force. But if the Turks should turn their serious attention to the recovery of Baghdad and should send to Mesopotamia the large organised forces which would be necessary for such an operation, then I consider that I should require one division (and I should like also one white cavalry regiment) in addition to my present force to watch both the Tigris and Euphrates lines of approach and defeat the enemy as he comes within reach. Further, the Baghdad position would be the best from which to do this. Kut is 103 miles and Townshend at Aziziya is 48 miles from Baghdad by road."

* Lord Kitchener was not present, being in France, but Mr. Chamberlain saw him next day on the matter.

Lord Hardinge's reply to Mr. Chamberlain's telegram of the 8th October was sent as a private telegram on the 9th and after he had seen General Nixon's reply: ". . . . I am glad of the decision of Cabinet. After consulting the Commander-in-Chief I think that Nixon is in the best position to judge as to the number of troops required. When he mentions a division we understand him to mean a fully organised division with its proper proportion of British troops and guns and its divisional cavalry. In addition to this he asks for a cavalry regiment. We are prepared to accept his opinion, but think that it will also be necessary to ensure that British units now with him are kept up to strength by drafts from Home, as India cannot supply these. We will keep the Indian units full. We may add that reinforcing troops should reach Baghdad not later than one month after its capture as this is the period which we calculate must elapse before the Turks could concentrate in strength to attempt its recapture."

On the 9th October Mr. Chamberlain telegraphed to Lord Hardinge: "Private. Hope to give you definite information as to possibility of reinforcement in a few days. Meanwhile Nixon should maintain his present position and be prepared to advance if reinforcements asked for can be sent to him. Please instruct him accordingly." Lord Hardinge repeated these instructions to General Nixon on the 10th, adding that he hoped very much that the required troops would be forthcoming and that the advance would not be much delayed. General Nixon communicated the instructions to General Townshend, who, he reported to India, "may be trusted not to commit himself without absolute military necessity." On the 11th, General Townshend informed his troops in a "Divisional Order" that H.M. Government had ordered that for the time being no advance was to be made on Baghdad.

In the meantime the Inter-Departmental Committee, comprising representatives of the Foreign Office, the India Office, the Admiralty and the War Office under the chairmanship of Sir Thomas Holderness (Under Secretary of State for India) had been considering the question.* Its terms of reference were:

* The Prime Minister had left it to Mr. Chamberlain whether he would preside himself or nominate a chairman. He chose the latter course as he considered that his own presence might be a bar to free and full discussion of the question. Sir T. Holderness told the Mesopotamia Commission that he knew that Mr. Chamberlain himself was much perplexed as to the expediency and prudence of an advance and was anxious that the Committee should not be biassed. Sir T. Holderness held no decided view on the proposal, which had come to him as a surprise.

"To consider in particular, having regard to the position in Persia, to the progress of the Baghdad railway and to all other relevant matters :

(1) Whether there should be an advance on Baghdad.
(2) The defensive positions at Baghdad as regards a possible advance of Turkish troops.
(3) Whether without Baghdad as point of departure any offensive operations on a large scale could be made by the Turks in the neighbourhood.
(4) Generally the effect which the occupation of Baghdad by us would have on the Turkish forces engaged against Russia and against ourselves in the Dardanelles."

The preliminary conclusions of the Committee were circulated on the 11th October to the Prime Minister and the Foreign and War Secretaries of State.* These conclusions were, briefly :

(1) Both on military and political grounds an early occupation of Baghdad was most desirable ; but unless General Nixon's force could be so reinforced that it could maintain its position after reaching Baghdad, no attempt should be made to occupy that city. The immediate reinforcements necessary for the retention of Baghdad were at least one division, on the Indian scale, and one or two regiments of cavalry : such reinforcements should without fail begin to arrive at Basra within four weeks of the issue of orders for the advance : these reinforcements could not be furnished from the garrison in India.

(2) The information before the Committee disclosed no purely defensive position near Baghdad of any great strength. But it was thought that the Baghdad district, if occupied by a sufficient force, offered considerable strategic advantages.

(3) Without Baghdad and the surrounding district as a base, the Turks could still assemble considerable forces and undertake offensive operations ; but they would be much less favourably situated in this respect than with Baghdad in their possession.

(4) From their imperfect knowledge of events in other theatres of war the Committee were unable to foresee with any certainty the effect which a British occupation of Baghdad would have on the Turkish forces engaged against the Russians and against ourselves in the Dardanelles.

In coming to their conclusions, the Committee noted : "It is understood that the existing number of vessels on the Tigris

* Their full report was not completed till the 16th.

is sufficient to enable the advance to be made and to ensure the supply of the advanced troops. The flotilla of shallow-draught gunboats now under construction will eventually be an important addition to the offensive power of General Nixon's force and will greatly contribute to the safety of the communications by river." It is evident from this and from the evidence given before the Mesopotamia Commission that the Committee did not realise how short General Nixon really was of river vessels. The India Office had, it is true, received some weeks previously General Nixon's urgent demand for additional vessels (alluded to in the preceding volume)* and had also received a telegram from him sent just before the battle of Kut asking that the supply of additional craft should be expedited. But the Committee were informed that many suitable vessels could, if necessary, be requisitioned in India;† and as none of the telegrams from General Nixon or India, advocating the advance, contained any hint of transport being insufficient or that the occupation of Baghdad was conditional on the existing transport being increased, they came to the conclusion, without further enquiry or discussion, that river transport was sufficient. It is as well to say here that General Nixon afterwards maintained that, if he had captured Baghdad as he expected, the shortage of river transport would not have mattered; for most of the wounded would not have had to be evacuated, supplies could have been obtained locally, some Turkish craft would have been captured, and the considerable number of losses among British vessels on the river would not have occurred.

The question of Baghdad and the preliminary report of the Holderness Committee were considered by the War Committee of the Cabinet on the 14th October at which Mr. Chamberlain was present. They had also before them a memorandum on the question by the General Staff at the War Office drawn up on the 12th. In this the General Staff estimated that if General Nixon was to take and occupy Baghdad it was necessary to reinforce him with two divisions; that with General Nixon's existing force a move to Baghdad would be a dangerous operation; that, in view of possible large allied movements in the Mediterranean in the near future, it was impossible to foresee how soon it might be practicable to

* Vol. I., Chapter XII.—It is, however, to be noted that General Barrow, the military representative of the India Office on the Committee, had not seen this correspondence. He was temporarily absent when it was received and it was not brought to his notice.

† This was not really correct.

transport troops from Europe to the Persian Gulf; and that unless India was prepared to supply the additional division required to justify an advance on Baghdad, such an advance should not be sanctioned until one or more divisions from France could leave Egypt for Mesopotamia. Lord Kitchener himself did not agree with the necessity for holding on to Baghdad and preferred instead a raid to destroy everything of military value. That would not necessitate our remaining, and we could withdraw without loss of prestige. The attitude of the Arabs on the lines of communication was also a matter for serious consideration. It was therefore decided that further expert opinion should be obtained to allow of a decision. Orders were accordingly issued for the preparation of a joint appreciation on the present and prospective situations in Mesopotamia and Syria by the War Staff of the Admiralty and the General Staff at the War Office in collaboration. In fact the Government decided to get the most skilled naval and military advice at their disposal.

The opinion that Baghdad could be occupied without much difficulty was at this time encouraged by the receipt of General Nixon's daily situation telegram of the 12th October, which contained the following: " . . . . In answer to query, Egypt wires 7th 'continued movement of enemy troops from Syria and Anatolia to Constantinople and no signs of anything important going to Mesopotamia.' Reliable information received here indicates no garrison of any importance in Baghdad October 5th." On the same day Mr. Chamberlain telegraphed to Lord Hardinge that Lord Kitchener was proposing to Sir John French the withdrawal from France to Egypt of the Indian infantry and until he had received a reply was unable to give Mr. Chamberlain a definite decision.

In his private letter of the 13th–14th October Mr. Chamberlain gave Lord Hardinge a brief review of the critical situation in the Near East.* The Austro-German and Bulgarian attack on Serbia had commenced; M. Venizelos had resigned; and Greece seemed unlikely to fulfil her treaty obligations to Serbia, although in response to the urgent entreaty of M. Venizelos a small allied force had landed at Salonika.† Naval and military opinion in London considered it too late to assist Serbia by way of Salonika—in any case a risky operation—and impossible to prevent munitions reaching Turkey from Central Europe. In consequence they were inclined to advocate a

* In a letter of the 14th to Lord Hardinge, Mr. Chamberlain questioned the adequacy of the medical arrangements in Mesopotamia.

† The Greek Government had made a general protest.

renewed offensive in Gallipoli, although they could not yet decide whether the troops required for this could not be utilised with more decisive effect in France. But the probability that Joffre did not contemplate an early offensive in France seemed to justify the Government in thus using any available troops. Mr. Chamberlain had not yet obtained a decision as to sending reinforcements for Mesopotamia, but he himself and the Prime Minister were in favour of it: he said "it seems to me that we have within our grasp a real and striking success in Mesopotamia, which would do much to counterbalance our failure in Gallipoli throughout the Far East and to render your position both in India and beyond the frontier more secure; and I do not know any portion of the theatre of war in which a single division could achieve such great results."

On the 14th October Mr. Chamberlain telegraphed to Lord Hardinge: "Private. A question has been raised as to sufficiency of reinforcements asked for by Nixon or even of two divisions to hold Baghdad against forces which Turks might eventually bring against him. This is now being considered by General Staff and Cabinet hope to get their report in three days. Are chances of eventual successful advance prejudiced by delay? We continue to attach greatest importance to capture of Baghdad if we can hold it securely." Lord Hardinge answered this telegram next day saying that unless the Turks strongly reinforced Baghdad in the meantime, of which they could see no immediate sign, delay would not prejudice the chances of an eventual successful advance, although success would be more costly owing to the longer time at the enemy's disposal for completion of his defences.

On the 15th October, Mr. Chamberlain wired to Lord Hardinge: "Private. In continuation of my private telegram of 14th War Office contemplate transfer of the two Indian infantry divisions from France to Egypt with the intention of placing them at your disposal for Mesopotamia if report of General Staff is favourable to occupation of Baghdad. But owing to uncertainty of position in Near East and possible need of transport for other purposes they cannot guarantee date of departure. Under these circumstances they do not consider that it would be safe for Nixon to advance on Baghdad before these troops have actually started from Egypt, unless you can undertake to supply him temporarily with a division from India in the event of these reinforcements being unavoidably delayed. I request early reply as to possibility of your undertaking this liability."

In writing to Lord Hardinge on the same day, Mr. Chamberlain informed him that it had been decided in consultation with the French to transfer a considerable force, including two Indian infantry divisions, to Egypt ;* that General Ian Hamilton had been recalled from the Dardanelles, General Monro having been detailed to take over the command of the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and report fully on the situation ; and that when his report had been received the Government would decide how the force in Egypt was to be employed. Mr. Chamberlain also explained how the hesitation of the General Staff at the War Office and the doubts of Lord Kitchener in regard to the advance on Baghdad, had come as a surprise to him and had led to the despatch of his telegrams of the 14th and 15th. He had always understood that without such a base as Baghdad a Turkish concentration, even against Baghdad itself, would be very difficult and almost impossible.

Mr. Chamberlain's telegram of the 15th found Lord Hardinge away from headquarters (viz., at Dehra Dun) and the latter consequently had to consult Sir Beauchamp Duff by telegram before replying on the 17th : " Private. Your private telegram of 15th October. Advance on Baghdad. Am I to understand that even if two Indian infantry divisions are transferred to Egypt, the uncertainty of position in the Near East may not merely delay their departure, but possibly even prevent their being available at all for Mesopotamia ?

" After consultation with Commander-in-Chief we agree that in no case could I undertake to supply from India even temporarily a further force of the strength of a division."

In writing to Mr. Chamberlain on the 15th Lord Hardinge had said that he could not help feeling that, though the capture of Baghdad would not really bring the war nearer to its close, the effect of its capture would be very great in the Near East, would have important consequences in Persia and Afghanistan and would assist the general situation in India which was difficult and likely to become so more and more. He also told Mr. Chamberlain that the munition factories started in India were steadily increasing their output and could do much more if machinery were available, but that they had mobilised all that could be found in India.

On the 18th Mr. Chamberlain telegraphed : " Private. Your private telegram of 17th October. Baghdad. Last paragraph. I thought it right to consult you but your answer is exactly what I stated in anticipation of your reply.

* This letter reached Lord Hardinge about four weeks later.

"I trust that answer to your first paragraph will be in the negative, but I understand your view to be that Nixon must not advance unless sailing of reinforcements is guaranteed. Am I right?"

At this stage Lord Hardinge found it necessary to summon Sir Beauchamp Duff to Dehra Dun for consultation and he so informed Mr. Chamberlain, who asked for an answer to be sent if possible in time for the meeting of the War Committee on the 21st October. The discussion between the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief took place at Dehra Dun on the 21st, and on the same day Lord Hardinge telegraphed the result to Mr. Chamberlain: "Private. Your private telegram of 18th instant. Baghdad. Government of India are in entire agreement with H.M. Government as to political and strategic advantages of the capture and occupation of Baghdad which are emphasised by contents of Mr. Marling's telegram of 15th October,* but we regard internal security of India and the security of our frontier as our first pre-occupation and are unable to send a further force of the strength of a division of troops from India to Mesopotamia.

"After consulting Commander-in-Chief I consider that there are three alternatives before us:—

"(i) *Take and occupy Baghdad.* This will present no difficulty whatever, provided that we are guaranteed reinforcements of a full division of troops reaching Mesopotamia within two months from now. This will be the most satisfactory solution.

"(ii) *Attack the Turks, raid Baghdad, capturing the few steamers that remain and stores, releasing the English female captives, destroying the railway north of Baghdad and dominating the city by river patrols from a camp south of Baghdad.*

"This would have a good political effect and the fact that we were not in actual occupation of Baghdad might not precipitate the despatch of Turkish reinforcements to recapture it. This, from a political point of view, would be only the second best alternative, but it would not require addition of a whole division to carry it out.

"The Commander-in-Chief from a military point of view dislikes this solution and would prefer either (i) or (iii) *see below.* He considers that Baghdad being great centre of supplies and a

* In this telegram Mr. Marling, H.M. Minister at Tehran, in addressing the Foreign Office, referred to the increased activity of German and Turkish agents in Persia as being probably due to the fear that Baghdad was about to fall into British hands, "which event would interrupt their present relatively easy line of communication with Constantinople . . . . If this surmise is correct, German great effort (viz., to bring Persia into the war against us) would seem to be imminent . . . ."

valuable base for whichever side is in possession of it, we must either hold it ourselves or keep well away from it. He does not think that it is possible to dominate it from south. We should have to be camped close to the suburbs, which in his opinion gives us all the disadvantages and none of the advantages of occupation. His view is that unless we hold Baghdad, Turkish reinforcements will be gradually dribbled into it and we may be attacked in strength without warning unless we are as far away as Kut al Amara. Nixon goes so far as to consider that even without reinforcements his army would be safer in and north of Baghdad than anywhere south of it, and Commander-in-Chief lays great stress on the value of Baghdad-Samarra railway in that it would prevent any possibility of surprise attack on us. He considers that all our interests lie in our holding Baghdad, but recognises that without addition our present forces might be driven out of it, and that this might involve a very difficult and dangerous retreat down the river. Shortly, he is opposed to a raid on Baghdad followed by a withdrawal. He is strongly in favour of holding Baghdad if reinforcements are forthcoming. If they are not forthcoming he prefers safety of Kut al Amara position. He feels, however, that present military situation is such that it may at any time become necessary to occupy Baghdad even with our existing forces and accept the risk involved.

" My own comment upon the Commander-in-Chief's view is that from a political point of view it would be disastrous to be driven out of Baghdad.

" (iii) *Remain in a defensive position at Kut al Amara.* This is a course that does not appeal to us, for it shows weakness which will be recognised both by the Turks and the tribes, and may force our hands into advancing after all.

" Having placed these alternatives before you I leave the question with confidence for H.M. Government to decide, but I trust that the decision will be in favour of the first alternative."

In referring to this telegram in his weekly letter of the 22nd October to Mr. Chamberlain, Lord Hardinge showed that India's inability to send troops was due to the necessity for keeping the North-West Frontier Province, the Punjab and the United Provinces quiet ; if he did this, he said, he had not much anxiety about the remaining provinces. He also said that he personally was in favour of a raid into Baghdad.

The War Committee of the Cabinet, at which Mr. Chamberlain was again present, met on the 21st to deal with the question of the Mesopotamia operations. Among the

papers before them were the report of the "Holderness" Committee, with a supplementary minute of the 15th October by General Barrow, and the appreciation prepared jointly by the Admiralty War Staff and the General Staff at the War Office, an important document completed on the 19th and signed by the First Sea Lord and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. While the meeting was being held, word came from the India Office that the Viceroy's telegram of the 21st, given above, had arrived; and it was laid before the Committee the same afternoon and was considered by them before coming to their decision.

The conclusions of the "Holderness" Committee have already been mentioned. General Barrow's supplementary minute, dated the 15th October, had been written after the Committee had drafted its report, in consequence of the information received in the meantime from General Nixon and India. It will be remembered that on the 4th October General Barrow had advised against going to Baghdad as he thought it was impracticable to send General Nixon the reinforcements of a division and one or two cavalry regiments which he considered necessary for the enterprise. On the assumption that it had been decided to send two divisions to Mesopotamia he now thought that it would be safe to advance to Baghdad. If one division only were to be sent, his opinoin was that the advisability of a raid on Baghdad followed by a withdrawal might well be considered. In any case a quick decision was necessary or the moral effect on the enemy of the battle of Kut would have worn off.

The paper prepared for the War Committee by the General Staff in consultation with the Admiralty War Staff is given in full in Appendix VIII.* For facility of reference, however, its main points are outlined here. After expressing the opinion that success or disaster in Mesopotamia would mainly affect India, and pointing out that the question of Syria and the Suez Canal and of the security of Egypt were important as affecting our direct communication with India, an estimate was given of the Turkish army dispositions. About 350,000 troops were taken as being about Constantinople and the Dardanelles; the force on the Caucasus front approximated 145,000; there were probably some 47,000 in Syria, and in Mesopotamia about 9,000 troops excluding irregulars. Inter-reinforcement between these four bodies was, however, a lengthy business owing to lack of communications and the great distances involved.

* "The present and prospective situation in Syria and Mesopotamia."

The paper then touched on the Balkan and Dardanelles situation and came to the conclusion that if Austro-German forces reached Constantinople, or the Allies abandoned their Dardanelles position, bodies of Turkish troops would be available for operations elsewhere, probably against Egypt and Mesopotamia.

The Syrian problem, or as the combined staffs described it "in other words the problem of the defence of Egypt" was then considered. The only portion of this part of the paper with which we are directly concerned here are the conclusions of the combined staffs, i.e., that the problem for practical purposes only presented two alternatives: (1) The undertaking of military operations on an extensive scale based on the Gulf of Iskanderun and (2) Defence of the line of the Suez Canal. They rejected the first alternative (giving their reasons) and recommended the second.

The paper then passed to the Mesopotamian problem. After dealing briefly with existing factors, they agreed that the occupation of Baghdad within the next few weeks was a perfectly feasible operation. The question appeared to them not to be one of getting there but one of remaining there, and consequently the main question to be examined was what the belligerents could effect from the coming December till the end of the war. An appendix to the paper showed that it was considered doubtful whether the Turks could maintain more than 60,000 troops near Baghdad, and consequently the combined staffs accepted this number as being a possible one and also that in some months this force might be augmented by German organising power and enterprise. The paper said: "The problem with which Sir John Nixon is faced, therefore, is that he has only 9,000 Turkish troops and some irregulars to deal with during the next two months, that these enemy forces may be somewhat increased by the end of the year and that they might conceivably reach a total of as much as 60,000 by the end of January."

Nixon's existing force was considered insufficient and the combined staffs were of opinion that the addition of a single Indian division would not render his position at Baghdad reasonably secure. If he were reinforced by two divisions, enabling him to maintain three divisions at the front, he might be strong enough; but it was always possible that at a later date the enemy would receive reinforcements, when his force would not be sufficient.

If a large Allied army were to land in the Gulf of Iskanderun,

as considered in the Syrian problem, it could fairly be assumed, they said, that the Turks would not be able to send more than 60,000 troops against Baghdad, but if such a landing were not to be made the combined staffs "consider that it would be unwise from their point of view to occupy Baghdad with the intention of staying there until the end of the war, but they would favour a raid, even if the raiding force were not withdrawn immediately, providing it remained entirely within the power of the military authorities to withdraw the troops at will."

They continued that a strong argument in favour of a temporary occupation of Baghdad was the probability that a failure to push on "now" might create nearly, if not quite, as bad an impression in the East as would a withdrawal after occupation. But if there was any doubt as to permission being given to the military authorities to withdraw from Baghdad at their discretion, on military grounds, the combined staffs were definitely against either occupation or a raid.

They concluded by urging that, whatever decision was come to, it was imperative that the force employed should be purely Indian, and that no troops should be diverted there from the primary theatre of war for the purpose of conducting this subsidiary operation "which cannot appreciably influence the decision as between the armies of the Allied and those of the Central Powers." Lord Kitchener, however, adhered to his former opinion that a raid would suffice and that a permanent stay at Baghdad was not necessary.

The War Committee, considered that the advantages of an occupation of Baghdad, which was deemed a perfectly feasible military operation by all the military authorities consulted, outweighed the disadvantages of possible eventual withdrawal; but before issuing the orders for the occupation they wished to be sure that the Government of India took the same view, more especially as there was some anxiety as to how far the reasons for an advance on Baghdad would lead to further dispersion of forces after its occupation and also as to the effect of a possible ultimate retirement, or of demands for further forces or for other operations to obviate such a retirement. The decision arrived at was that Mr. Chamberlain should draft, in consultation with three other Ministers, a telegram to the Viceroy. This telegram ran as follows: "Private. Your private telegram of 21st October. Baghdad advance. Report of combined staffs estimates that Nixon has only some 9,000 Turkish troops and some irregulars to

deal with for next two months ; that Turkish forces may be somewhat increased by end of year and they might conceivably reach a total of 60,000 by end of January and even larger figures during 1916.* They consider that if reinforced by two Indian divisions from France he might, with assistance of river flotilla, face risk of attack by 60,000, but there would remain possibility of enemy receiving further reinforcements at later date. Staffs hold, therefore, that it would be unwise from purely military point of view to occupy Baghdad unless military authorities have power to withdraw troops at once without regard to political considerations if military exigencies make this necessary. The War Office would give the two Indian divisions, but could not under any circumstances spare further reinforcements, and are doubtful of their capacity even to supply drafts if wastage from casualties or sickness is severe. They think Baghdad can be taken easily and held for some time, but as explained above it might become untenable later.

" At present moment it seems that German attempt to break through to Constantinople will succeed, and our position and prospects in Gallipoli are most uncertain. Persia seems drifting into war on German side,† whilst Arabs are wavering and unless we can offer them great inducement will probably join Turks. We are therefore in great need of striking success in the East both to check Persian movement and to win Arabs. Unless you consider that possibility of eventual withdrawal is decisive against the advance, all other considerations seem to us to render it desirable, and we are prepared to order it."

Sir Beauchamp Duff told the Mesopotamia Commission that his attitude towards the advance on Baghdad changed as soon as he saw from this telegram the political necessity for a striking success and he was, in consequence, prepared to take risks which he would otherwise not have taken. On the other hand, Lord Hardinge told the Mesopotamia

* The Mesopotamia Commission misunderstood the significance of this sentence, which they mention as introducing a new factor into the situation and which they consider should have been notified to General Nixon at once. Whereas, it was an estimate of numbers that the Turks might possibly be able to put into Mesopotamia ; an estimate based on conditions, factors and intelligence, which were equally at the disposal of General Nixon's staff and the General Staff at the War Office ; for the War Office sent General Nixon regular intelligence telegrams direct acquainting him with items of intelligence as received.

† On the 22nd news was received from a secret source that the German Government had stated that Persia was going to join the Germanic Alliance.

Commission that he could not recollect that Sir Beauchamp Duff had emphasised very strongly the risks that were being run.

Lord Hardinge replied on the 23rd :* " Private. Your private telegram of 21st instant. Baghdad advance. Your description of the situation in the Near East proves conclusively the necessity for action in the Middle East. We accept the calculation of the combined staffs of possible strength of Turks that may with time be brought against us, but with reinforcement of two Indian divisions from France we believe that Sir J. Nixon has a reasonable prospect of being able to hold his own against 60,000 or 70,000 Turks, provided that he occupies Baghdad as soon as he is ready. Although I realise that the occupation of Baghdad is a provocation that will probably determine the Turks to send large forces to attack us, which, however, will not be easy for them to do, and although the bad effect of a possible withdrawal in the future cannot be ignored, I am confident that the right policy at the present time is to take the risk and to occupy Baghdad with the least possible delay, relying upon you to send the two divisions from France as quickly as possible to Mesopotamia. On this understanding, I propose, unless I hear from you before Monday† to the contrary, to order Nixon to march on Baghdad at once."

On the 23rd October, the Cabinet authorised Mr. Chamberlain to send the Viceroy the following telegram : " . . . . Nixon may march on Baghdad if he is satisfied that force he has available is sufficient for the operation. Reinforcements will take time owing to relief and transport arrangements, but two divisions will be sent as soon as possible. I will telegraph probable date later."

This telegram was repeated by India on the 24th October to General Nixon, who was instructed to take action accordingly. As will be shown later, however, the actual advance on Baghdad from Aziziya did not commence till some weeks later.

Lord Kitchener did not altogether concur in the telegram sent to Lord Hardinge on the 21st October. He was not in favour of anything but a raid on Baghdad, he was loth to part with the two Indian divisions and he was extremely anxious

* Sir Beauchamp Duff told the Mesopotamia Commission that to the best of his recollection he had not seen this telegram before despatch, as he had by that time arrived back in Simla from Dehra Dun.

† 25th October.

about the security of Egypt. On the 21st, he sent Mr. Chamberlain the following draft of what he would like the Viceroy to know: "The German attempt to get through to Constantinople appears to be likely to succeed. Their object being not to disseminate their forces by tying up troops in the Balkans or further east but to supply munitions to enable Turkish army to drive us out of Gallipoli, then forcing Turks to attack us either in Egypt or Mesopotamia, or both. To defend these threatened points we should have to withdraw troops from main theatre in France while Germans working on interior lines could return to that theatre.

"If in these circumstances Gallipoli could not hold out we should only be able to stop the Turkish movement on Mesopotamia at Alexandretta. General Staff report operations there entailing occupation of Aleppo would require very large force seriously weakening our position in France. If Baghdad is occupied and Gallipoli evacuated, a force of 60,000 to 70,000 Turks might be sent there while Egypt was also seriously threatened and reinforcements for Mesopotamia would not be available from this side.

"If Gallipoli holds out the Turks would be unable to send any considerable expedition to Mesopotamia."

Mr. Chamberlain wrote to Lord Kitchener on the 22nd, sending him a copy of the telegram despatched to the Viceroy on the 21st; and he said that this telegram covered the essential points in Lord Kitchener's draft as to the force which might be directed against General Nixon in certain eventualities and as to the impossibility of sending him further reinforcements in any such eventuality. In these circumstances, said Mr. Chamberlain, he had not included Lord Kitchener's draft, as it appeared to him and the other ministerial colleagues who had assisted him to draft the telegram, that to do so would only create confusion in Lord Hardinge's mind.

Lord Kitchener, answering the same day, regretted that his opinion had not been sent to Lord Hardinge quite privately by Mr. Chamberlain. He considered the telegram of the 21st to be somewhat misleading, as its whole tone seemed to him to point out to Lord Hardinge that, after careful examination, everyone considered that the occupation (i e., of Baghdad) was a wise step to take. Lord Kitchener said that he had no doubt that Lord Hardinge would agree with the lead that had been given him.*

* Mr. Chamberlain informed Lord Hardinge of this discussion in his weekly letter of the 29th October.

As a result, it was at once agreed that Lord Kitchener should send his message and any other information which he thought material for the Viceroy's knowledge in the form of an intelligence report to the Commander-in-Chief in India.* The telegram so sent by the War Office on the 22nd October was as follows: ". . . . An appreciation of intelligence in the Near East is as follows:—The Germans appear to be likely to succeed in their attempt to get through to Constantinople, their object being to supply munitions to enable the Turkish army to drive us out of Gallipoli rather than to disseminate their own forces by tying up troops in the Balkans. Some 200,000 Turks would thus be freed and rendered available for operations against us either in Egypt or in Mesopotamia or in both. If our threats on Constantinople from the Dardanelles should cease, the consequent Turkish movement on Mesopotamia could only be stopped at Alexandretta, and the occupation of Aleppo, requiring a considerable force, would be entailed by operations there."

The Commander-in-Chief in India, however, did not read into this telegram the meaning which Lord Kitchener appears to have intended, for he answered on the 25th: ". . . . Reference your telegram . . . . of 22nd . . . . We agree with your appreciation therein as to the value of Alexandretta for stopping Turkish movement on Mesopotamia other than via Angora or from the Caucasus. We have to be prepared, however, to meet the Turks in superior numbers; and this being the case, Baghdad, the best position at which to meet them, should be immediately occupied and a reinforcement of two Indian divisions should reach the Tigris within two months. Baghdad in Turkish hands becomes the base for Turkish operations by both the Tigris and Euphrates lines, and for the coercion of Persia; while, politically, the failure to seize what appears to be within our grasp would be interpreted through Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan and the East as weakness . . . . (Here followed some queries regarding the state of Turkish communications) . . . . Please keep us informed of the military situation in the Near East . . . ."

These telegrams inaugurated a system of closer *liaison* between the General Staffs at the War Office and in India,

* These and communications on military technical details were regularly sent direct by the War Office to the Commander-in-Chief in India, without the intervention of the India Office and the Government of India which was the usual procedure in other matters. There had been a period during the first months of the war when Lord Kitchener and Sir Beauchamp Duff exchanged telegrams direct regarding military operations, but the procedure had been discontinued on constitutional grounds.

which was maintained with increasing efficiency until the end of the war. This procedure proved of very great benefit to both; for, while it brought more clearly before the War Office the difficulties of the situation in the East, it enabled the Indian military authorities to appreciate better the Imperial point of view and to regard their local problems in a truer perspective in regard to the world-war as a whole.

In the meantime, while the question of an advance on Baghdad was being debated in the British Cabinet, the question of what India could do to meet any sudden emergency in Mesopotamia, before the arrival there of the expected reinforcements from France, was engaging the attention of the General Staff in India. They arrived at the conclusion that it was just possible for India to organise and concentrate an "Emergency Force" of two infantry brigades, two cavalry regiments and one brigade of artillery; and on the 13th October Sir Percy Lake, the Chief of the General Staff, urged upon the Commander-in-Chief the desirability of detailing this force.

Sir Percy Lake considered that it was only sound to determine the course of action to be adopted in the event of the reinforcements from France being delayed, being diverted elsewhere, or being possibly unsuitable for immediate service in Mesopotamia. There was, too, always the possibility that the Turks might succeed in concentrating large forces in the vicinity of Baghdad without our knowledge. The battle of Kut on the 28th September and the importance of Baghdad might well cause the immediate despatch of Turkish reinforcements from Asia Minor. Although these might not arrive in time to prevent General Nixon opening the road to Baghdad, yet they could arrive shortly afterwards and in such force as to require an immediate reinforcement of Force "D" pending the arrival of the divisions from France.

In any case, said Sir Percy Lake, the moral effect in Upper India, and particularly in the Punjab, of such a concentration would be considerable; it would be likely to deter revolutionary activities and would be a good answer to a German plot which was reported to aim at a rising about Christmas time.

On the 25th October, after the receipt of the British Cabinet's decision to advance on Baghdad, the Commander-in-Chief issued orders for the mobilisation and concentration of this emergency force to be put in hand at once.

It is convenient to give here a brief summary of the private correspondence that took place during the next four weeks

between Mr. Chamberlain and Lord Hardinge, as it contained much that is relevant to this period. Mr. Chamberlain was getting anxious that no expense should be spared in ensuring that everything necessary and possible should be done to make the medical arrangements adequate and complete in Mesopotamia and Lord Hardinge was beginning personally to enquire into the question. Mr. Chamberlain was also much concerned at the War Office failure to supply India and Mesopotamia with drafts of British troops to replace wastage and he continued to press the War Office and the Cabinet to rectify matters.

Mr. Chamberlain expressed considerable anxiety about the situation in the Dardanelles and both he and Lord Hardinge realised that an Allied evacuation of their positions in that area would add an additional risk to the advance on Baghdad.* The possibility of failure at the Dardanelles, however, seemed to make it all the more necessary to push our success in Mesopotamia; and, while Mr. Chamberlain expressed his confidence that General Nixon would carry out the coming advance with the skill and prudence which had characterised his past operations, Lord Hardinge trusted that if evacuation of the Dardanelles became necessary the Russians would be able to keep the Turks so busy elsewhere that they would be unable to undertake the difficult task of sending and supplying a large force to Mesopotamia. The difficulties and dangers of the long Turkish line of communications to Baghdad and the promised despatch of two Indian divisions as reinforcements for General Nixon seemed to justify the advance.

In writing regarding the possible evacuation of the Dardanelles,† Lord Hardinge said that he realised the question would have to be decided in accordance with the general strategical requirements of the Allies in Europe, though

* On the 6th November Mr. Chamberlain sent Lord Hardinge a private telegram giving him the very secret news, for his own and Sir Beauchamp Duff's information only, that Lord Kitchener was going to the Dardanelles and that though, pending receipt of his report, no decision would be taken, there was a possibility of an early evacuation. Lord Hardinge replied emphasising the adverse effects in the East of such a policy, which would not be counterbalanced by the capture of Baghdad.

† The dates on which the most important events concerning the evacuation of the Dardanelles took place were as follows:—

14th October 1915.	H.M. Government decided to recall Sir Ian Hamilton.
20th October 1915.	H.M. Government ordered Sir Charles Monro to take over command and report fully on the situation.
31st October 1915.	Sir C. Monro telegraphed advocating evacuation.

from an Indian point of view it was undesirable as exposing us to attack at Baghdad, Aden, and on the Suez Canal.

Lord Kitchener, said Mr. Chamberlain, was extremely anxious about the situation in Egypt and was afraid that we were on the brink of a general and combined Arab rising in co-operation with the Turks. In consequence, negotiations from Egypt were being carried out with the Arabs, of which Mr. Chamberlain did not entirely approve, as their intentions seemed not to be altogether in accord with the views held in India and Mesopotamia.

The Allied expedition to Salonika seemed likely to fail in its object and the Greek attitude was equivocal and gave cause for anxiety.

At the end of October and beginning of November, although there had been another attack by tribesmen (Bajauris), Sir George Roos-Keppel reported an improvement in the situation on the North-West Frontier of India. It was lucky, said Lord Hardinge, that the tribes did not combine for a simultaneous attack. He was, and had been for the past seven or eight months, very anxious as to what the future might bring forth, as nobody could say what the effect of a reverse on the frontier would be, nor what was going on underground. The Commander-in-Chief felt as he did. One advantage was that the attitude of the Amir continued most satisfactory. He had had two interviews with the German mission: at the first he had refused their request to join in alliance with them; and at the second he did not reply to their request to be allowed to return to Herat, with the result that they were virtually prisoners. It appeared to Lord Hardinge that the Amir, whom he considered one of the great statesmen of the age, was seizing the opportunity to secure a satisfactory recognition of his position both from Great Britain and Russia.

3rd November 1915.	Lord Kitchener invited by 'War Council' to go East and report.
4th November 1915.	Lord Kitchener telegraphed General Birdwood instructing him to draw out secretly provisional plan for evacuation. (Lord Kitchener himself still averse to evacuation.)
17th November 1915.	Anglo-French Conference in Paris rejected proposal of evacuation conditional on operations elsewhere, such as Alexandretta.
22nd November 1915.	Lord Kitchener recommended evacuation, but to retain Helles for the time being.
23rd November 1915.	War Council recommended evacuation.
7th December 1915.	H.M. Government decided to evacuate Suvla and Anzac (completed 20th December).
27th December 1915.	H.M. Government decided to evacuate Helles (completed 8th January 1916).

CHAPTER XIV.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE ADVANCE TOWARDS BAGHDAD.

(SEE MAP 8.)

IN the preceding chapter it has been shown in some detail how the decision to advance to Baghdad was arrived at. None of the military authorities concerned had seriously questioned General Nixon's assurance that he had sufficient troops to defeat the beaten remnant of Nur-ud-Din's army—the only apparent barrier between him and Baghdad ; and the idea of so easy an advance had been welcomed by His Majesty's Government. The only point in doubt had been the ability of the British Government to provide the reinforcements required to hold Baghdad after its occupation ; and this had been settled by the decision to send General Nixon the two Indian infantry divisions from France, i.e., double the force he had asked for.

There is ground for supposing that General Nixon had at first visualised a much earlier advance than actually took place ; and he cannot be blamed for delay due to purely physical conditions which could not be foreseen. At the same time, it is necessary to add that a careful study of the facts briefly set forth in the following pages shows little, if any, justification for the statement, sometimes made, that the two weeks' delay in arriving at the decision to advance proved prejudicial to the success of the operations. For it will be seen that from the 5th October, when General Townshend's force arrived at Aziziya, the preparations in Mesopotamia for the advance were carried out steadily and continuously ; and there is nothing to show that, under the conditions prevailing, these preparations could have been accelerated to any appreciable extent.

On the 4th October, while his river column was slowly making its way up the Tigris to Aziziya, General Townshend complied with General Nixon's instructions to submit his general plan for opening the way to Baghdad. In this, as a preliminary to the concentration of his force, General Townshend proposed to locate the advanced portion at Aziziya, with the remainder echeloned back along the river in two bodies, both within thirty-six hours' march of Aziziya. He could thus unite his troops rapidly in the event of a hostile advance ; and he also hoped in this way to mystify Nur-ud-Din as to his intentions.

Once the concentration of his force had been completed, General Townshend proposed to move forward by land with the general idea of turning the left flank of the Turkish position at Ctesiphon. If the Turks, after being driven out of the Ctesiphon position, stood again to fight at the Diyala river, the same general plan of turning their left flank would be adopted.

Before the advance to Ctesiphon began, General Townshend said that he would require twenty-one days' supplies of all kinds for his whole force to be collected at Aziziya, with a further two months' supplies collected at Kut; and that he would want all the land transport that could be provided. He also asked that the two battalions of the 30th Brigade which had been given him at the battle of Kut might again be added to his force.

This plan received General Nixon's general approval. He agreed that the forward movement must be made principally by land; and steps had already been taken to collect local camels and donkeys, of which the numbers obtainable were said to be ample. He would get up the bullocks General Townshend required for the heavy guns, but these would require two steamers and four barges; and he pointed out the necessity of the whole arriving at Aziziya by the 21st October in order to avoid any risk of land movements being suddenly cut short by rain, which was to be anticipated about the end of October. It might, he thought, be found necessary to cut down the programme, and, in any case, he was obliged to take away at once two of General Townshend's four river steamers to bring men and stores from Basra.

In addition to supplies and munitions, horse artillery and cavalry reinforcements had to be sent up to General Townshend; and the 6th Division required from Basra over 1,700 men to replace losses, 284 bullocks for the heavy guns and as many transport animals as possible. In view of the limited number of river craft and of the difficulties of navigation, General Nixon found it necessary to draw out a minimum programme of transportation which would have to be strictly adhered to. This limited the river craft available for the line of communication forces and thus added to the general difficulties of the situation by making it impossible to cope efficiently with Arab raiders, who at this period caused General Gorringe, at Amara, much anxiety.

As the idea of an advance on Baghdad developed in General Nixon's mind, his attention turned to the possibility of

assistance or co-operation by the Russian forces in the neighbourhood of Lake Van; and on the 4th October he enquired from India if the Russians in that area were progressing sufficiently to be able to threaten the Turkish route from Asia Minor along the Upper Tigris. The answer next day, however, showed that there was only a small Russian detachment on the south-eastern edges of Lake Van, opposed by a small Turkish detachment. It was evident, therefore, that little, if any, assistance could be looked for from that quarter.

On the 5th October, when the river column reached Aziziya, the British ceased their advance. An entrenched camp was organised for the force on the left bank of the Tigris, being connected with the right bank by a boat-bridge nearly 300 yards long; and "Frazer's Post," garrisoned by a battalion of Indian infantry, was established at the neck of the loop in the Tigris, four miles south of Aziziya, to prevent the enemy's cavalry establishing guns there for use against the shipping.

Aziziya, a small village of mud huts in the bare desert, was not in General Townshend's opinion a desirable place as an advanced post if it should be decided not to advance against Ctesiphon. In representing this to General Nixon, General Townshend mentioned Bughaila as a better position in such circumstances; here the pilgrim route from Hilla and Babylon joined the Tigris and the advanced force would be at a reasonable supporting distance from Kut.

On the 6th October, in accordance with orders from General Nixon, two columns left Kut to join General Townshend, who had with him at Aziziya only three and a half squadrons of the 7th Lancers and 16th Cavalry, the 63rd Field Battery and the 18th Infantry Brigade. One of the columns consisted of the headquarters of the cavalry brigade (under its new commander, Brigadier-General H. L. Roberts), one hundred sabres 16th Cavalry and half "S" Battery, R.H.A. The other column, under General Delamain, comprised the 76th and 82nd Field Batteries, 1/5th Hants Howitzer Battery, the Maxim Battery, 22nd Company of Sappers and Miners and the 16th Infantry Brigade.

Meanwhile, on the 5th and 6th, reconnaissance by aircraft and cavalry discovered that the Turks had pushed troops downstream from Ctesiphon and had occupied a position near Zor, on the left bank of the Tigris about fifteen miles from Aziziya, with a force estimated at a cavalry regiment, two field guns and three or four infantry battalions. On the 7th October, Arabs reported to General Townshend that the Turks were

taking the offensive and meant to attack him. As the 18th Infantry Brigade had an effective strength of only about 2,200, General Townshend decided that the possibility of a Turkish attack necessitated the early concentration of his division at Aziziya. He consequently sent orders to the columns *en route* from Kut under Generals Delamain and Roberts to push on to Aziziya without delay, and similar orders were subsequently sent to the 17th Brigade, which left Kut on the 8th October. General Roberts' column reached Aziziya on the 8th, that under General Delamain arrived on the 9th, and the 17th Brigade, under General Hoghton, came in on the evening of the 10th, having covered the last fifty miles in two days. A temporary revival of hot weather and the fact that a great part of the road lay far from water, across successive loops of the Tigris, rendered this forced march very trying to the troops and disclosed to the infantry commanders that many of their men were feeling the strain of their experiences in Mesopotamia and badly needed a rest. Although in the case of the British infantry this feeling may have been partly due to the fact that many of them were suffering at the time from illness, subsequently diagnosed as *beri-beri*,* the Indian infantry, especially those of the 16th Brigade, who had been longest in the country, were undoubtedly tired men ; and at the end of the march General Delamain reported the fact to General Townshend and gave it as his opinion that they were consequently no longer as efficient as they had been.

On the 10th October, General Townshend was informed of the instructions sent by His Majesty's Government to General Nixon to maintain his present position and to be prepared to advance if he received reinforcements, and also of General Nixon's reply to the Viceroy that General Townshend could be trusted not to commit himself without absolute military necessity. General Townshend took this as meaning that he was an independent commander and would be held responsible. By that evening the greater part of his fighting troops were concentrated at Aziziya, giving him about 6,000 effective infantry and pioneers, 200 sappers, 400 cavalry and 25 guns. Efforts to obtain local transport had not been very successful and the 18th Infantry Brigade was in consequence practically immobile.

The same day, a Turkish detachment, estimated at 1,500 strong, pushed forward some seven miles from Zor to Kutuniya ;

* The cold nights after the hot days at this period also brought out a lot of latent fever.

and the British cavalry with three horse artillery guns to the northward of Aziziya drove back a mixed Turkish detachment. In this affair the Turks lost some twenty men and the British suffered six casualties. From this date onwards the British cavalry were in constant contact with Turkish advanced troops, and many skirmishes took place. It seemed evident that the Turks had recovered from their recent defeat and intended to oppose actively any further British advance. From this time also, the attitude of the local Arabs became increasingly hostile. Though, during the British pursuit after the battle of Kut, many of the Arabs in the river villages had evinced signs of friendliness to the British, they soon began to fire at our ships and took every opportunity to raid. This change of attitude was further exemplified on the night of 10th/11th October, when a small body of Arabs attacked "Frazer's Post." They surprised the garrison and, cutting the barbed wire, some Arabs penetrated into the post, but Colonel Frazer, personally leading a handful of men, ejected them.

General Townshend at this time enquired from General Nixon whether the "present position" mentioned by the Government's instructions meant Aziziya or Kut. He said: ". . . . If the Army Commander desires us to remain here, then I shall make it a strongly entrenched camp after I have hit the force in my front; if on the other hand I am ordered to recede, the first steps in retirement would equally be hitting the force in our front . . . ." At the same time he drew attention to the weakness of his force in effectives and trusted that drafts were on their way to him. He also asked what General Nixon thought of the reported entrance of the Anaiza and Shammar Arab tribes into the contest on the side of the Turks. This report, if true, seemed entirely to alter the situation in regard to Baghdad, as the two tribes could unite thousands of fighting men and their example would have great political influence.

General Townshend was informed in reply that the position at Aziziya should be maintained until the general policy of Government became known; that there was no reason to anticipate an order for retirement; that the report regarding the Anaiza and Shammar tribes was discredited; and that drafts were on their way up to him. Further, "in the Army Commander's opinion an offensive movement against the enemy at Zor should be deferred, unless your hand is forced by the enemy, until your orders permit of that movement being followed up by a general advance."

On the 11th October, General Townshend issued a Divisional Order tendering his thanks to his troops for their actions during the 230-mile advance from Amara and informing them that for the present Government orders were to hold their present position and not to advance to Baghdad.

At this time the total strength of the Turkish forces on the Tigris south of Baghdad was estimated by General Nixon's headquarters at about 7,500, with 25 guns, which included four battalions recently withdrawn from the Euphrates line ; the strength in Baghdad was placed at 900, with four guns ; and it was thought that during October reinforcements might bring the Turkish numbers south of Baghdad up to 9,500. Information from British Intelligence officers in Egypt indicated a continual movement of Turkish troops from Syria and Anatolia towards Constantinople, but there were no signs of any important forces going to Mesopotamia. General Nixon's General Staff saw no reason, therefore, to doubt that they could push on and complete their success of the 28th September. On the 12th October, however, General Townshend evinced some anxiety as to the safety of his line of communication with Kut and once again referred to the importance of Bughaila, where the road from Babylon and Hilla joined the Tigris. But General Headquarters reassured him that no attack by Turkish troops from the Euphrates was likely, as there were then no Turkish troops in that region.

General Townshend had intended to attack the Turkish detachment at Kutuniya on the 13th October ; but he cancelled his orders on the 12th, when news was received that they had withdrawn to Zor. This withdrawal, however, proved temporary as the Turkish detachment returned to Kutuniya on the 13th.

On the 14th, General Townshend heard from General Nixon that no further news as to Government policy had been received and that this looked as if arrangements were being made to provide reinforcements. On the same day he asked General Townshend the following three questions ". . . . What is your general view of the military situation on your front ? Supposing the policy permits, on what date would you be prepared to resume offensive ? What would be your general plan of operations ? "

In his reply next day General Townshend answered these questions in the following sense : (i) Nur-ud-Din was acting on the strategic defensive with 8,000 combatants and twenty-five guns distributed between the positions at Ctesiphon and

Zor. The force at Zor, with its advanced detachment at Kutuniya, was estimated at a total of about 6,000 combatants. It appeared, therefore, as if Nur-ud-Din intended to give battle at Zor instead of at Ctesiphon; or possibly he meant to take the offensive, for he could hardly be unaware of our weakness in numbers and how extraordinarily weakly held was our long line of communications; (ii) Before he moved from Aziziya, General Townshend said he would require twenty-one days' supplies in hand; and (iii) having concentrated he would move forward with his united force up the left bank of the Tigris with the object of destroying the bulk of the Turkish force opposing him. His general directing idea would be the same as for the battle of Kut, viz., a decisive attack against the enemy's flank while holding the remainder of the enemy.

On the 14th, Sir Percy Cox had wired to Major Leachman, one of his political assistants who was with General Townshend, saying that owing to the inactivity of our force the attitude of the Arabs towards us was beginning to waver. General Townshend took this message as intended to show him that an early offensive was desirable on political grounds. He refused, however, as he told General Nixon, to take the Arab attitude as a factor towards determining his military action as, owing to their characteristics, the Arabs could never be relied on.

On the 16th October, General Townshend, changing his mind with regard to moving forward along the left bank of the Tigris, proposed to advance up the right bank and thus manoeuvre the Turks out of both the Zor and the Ctesiphon positions. To carry out this operation he would require the whole of the 30th Infantry Brigade to occupy Aziziya during his advance.

General Nixon, although favourable to this new scheme, considered that it would require careful preparation and pointed out that General Townshend's force must be largely dependent on ships for its supplies and could not operate for long away from the river. The force, moreover, must be dependent on the river for water; and rain at any moment might temporarily interfere with land movements. Possibly two battalions of the 30th Brigade might be made available to hold Aziziya.

Discussion over the plan continued until the 31st October, when General Townshend submitted to General Nixon his final project for the operations. In the course of this discussion, General Townshend pointed out that the existing low state of the river precluded great use being made of ships and he queried whether this condition would have improved much by the end

of the month. He observed that embarkation of troops was a slow process and disembarkation was not always possible where desired. As regards the rain, this would affect the Turks' movements as much as our own. General Nixon in reply considered that the ships were a very great asset: they gave our force the power of crossing the river when they wished to do so; and they could tow the heavy guns which rain—and rain was absolutely certain—would render immobile on land. General Nixon, in fact, insisted on the use of ships; and General Townshend finally had to accept the use of them for one of his infantry brigades.

The question of these alternative methods of transport was not easy to settle; and it seems probable that General Nixon was impelled to the above decision by his failure to obtain locally as much land transport as he desired.* Ships, if available in sufficient numbers, had great advantages; though a glance at Map 8 shows that owing to the winding course of the Tigris, they would have to travel roughly double the distance that land transport would have to go; and this at a time when the low state of the river, with its many shoals and shifting sandbanks, rendered navigation slow and uncertain. Moreover, the fact that the force was tied to the ships must seriously hamper its manoeuvring power. On the other hand, movement by land away from the river was limited by the lack of water; and, considering that all forage and fuel had to be carried, the number of camels and donkeys would have to be very large and would require a large force to protect them.

In regard to the heavy guns, they would be much less efficient in barges than on land. The experience of the naval guns in Mesopotamia at this period showed the disadvantages they were under as compared with artillery on land. When the river banks were high they could only fire indirectly at extreme range; and as observation of fire was difficult their effect was chiefly moral. The masts of the ships offered the enemy a mark easy to range upon and added to the difficulties of taking up effective positions. Fortunately, however, the hostile fire had hitherto been but indifferently directed and the ships and barges had suffered but few casualties from long range Turkish fire.

At this stage it will be convenient to enter further into the question of the shortage of river transport. As shown

* There were at this time available at Basra some 2,000 transport mules and many carts, but there were not sufficient river steamers to bring them up in time; and the local inhabitants were showing the greatest reluctance to provide transport for an advance above Kut.

in the preceding volume, the river steamers at the disposal of the force in Mesopotamia had been only just sufficient for its needs when the floods in the spring of 1915 rendered movements by land impossible. In consequence, and also as the operations of the force extended up the Karun and Euphrates rivers, the shortage of river transport became increasingly apparent; and no additional steamers for these operations had been demanded from India before the monsoon set in.* The seven "P" class steamers sent from India in March and April, in reply to General Barrett's demand, drew 4 feet 6 inches and could only proceed up the Tigris above Qurna with difficulty, while they could not go at all up the Karun and the Euphrates. General Nixon had been asked in his original instructions of March to report on the adequacy and suitability of these steamers, but appears at first to have overlooked the request. On the 27th May, however, he reported that he would shortly be faced with river conditions when the "P" class steamers and four tugs sent from India could not work above Qurna on the Tigris, on the Euphrates or on the Karun, and he asked for six powerful light-draught tugs; but was told that none answering to his specifications were obtainable in India, and they were ordered from England where they had to be specially built.† In July, General Nixon sent to India a full report on his river craft requirements. He condemned the "P" class steamers as unsuitable and he asked India to arrange for the construction of six paddle steamers, three stern-wheelers, eight tugs‡ and many barges, for all of which he laid down definite specifications. These were at once ordered from England, as being a quicker process than getting them built in India from materials which would partly have to come from England. At the end of June, General Nixon had assured the Commander-in-Chief in India that he could maintain a division at Kut al Amara under all conditions of river; and at the beginning of August he had urged its occupation without mentioning any anticipated difficulties owing to the shortage of river transport. This omission

* The monsoon lasted from about the beginning of May till the end of September; and during this period river steamers could not make the overseas voyage.

† Light-draught tugs with less power than those asked for were available in India and were subsequently sent to Mesopotamia. That they were not sent before was due to misunderstandings between the authorities in India and Mesopotamia.

‡ This number included the six asked for in May.

may have been due to the fact that he knew that, owing to the monsoon, he could get no additional river craft from India until October. If so, it was unfortunate, as it tended to lead the military authorities in India to minimise the effect of the shortage of the river craft on his operations ; for they knew that at and above Amara troops could move by land and that supplies and transport were to some extent obtainable locally.

On the 25th September, just before the battle of Kut, General Nixon wired to India urging strongly that everything possible should be done to expedite delivery of the river craft ordered as a result of his July memorandum, and he pointed out how the concentration of General Townshend's force had been hampered and delayed by the shortage of river craft. In reply he was told on the 2nd October that the Secretary of State had wired that the river craft asked for would be supplied as early as possible.

When General Nixon wired to Mr. Chamberlain on the 8th October that he could occupy Baghdad without any further addition to his force, the authorities in England and India assumed that he had sufficient river craft. Next day, however, General Nixon telegraphed to India as follows : " When may I expect to receive river craft ? Ships drawing over 3 feet 9 inches are now useless above Kut and navigate lower reaches with difficulty and frequent groundings. This applies to all ' P ' class ships. Please procure quickly some powerful light-draught tugs or stern-wheelers in India which will serve present needs and thereby greatly strengthen the military operations which are very seriously impeded. This is a very urgent need."

It was obvious that it would take some weeks to obtain, prepare and despatch steamers from India and General Nixon was answered at once that the Secretary of State had been asked to expedite the construction in England of the river craft ordered ;* and that if additional craft were wanted from India General Nixon should telegraph his definite requirements. These General Nixon wired on the 13th October. The maximum draught of tugs, he said, should be 3 feet 6 inches and of stern-wheelers 2 feet 6 inches ; and if anything of suitable draught and approximating to other requirements could be sent quickly they would serve as useful stopgaps until the new craft arrived. River

* From a telegram of the 15th October from the India Office it was clear that the type of steamer to be constructed was not yet definitely settled.

conditions, said General Nixon, would probably improve in November, but only light-draught ships could be expected to work with fair satisfaction until the river rose in February; and he would be grateful if India would do whatever was possible in the meantime to meet his requirements. Enquiries were at once set on foot in India, but they took time. General Nixon wired again on the 24th October, the day that he had received sanction to advance on Baghdad, asking urgently for river steamers to reach him in advance of the reinforcements coming from France.

From the wording of this last telegram the military authorities in India realised that General Nixon was prepared to depart from all his previous specifications and take what he could get from India; and the Director of the Royal Indian Marine was instructed to send him a list of river craft available in India, which appeared suitable, with their dimensions, speed, draught and carrying capacity. On the 26th October General Nixon was informed that this was being done and that on receipt of the list he should state his requirements. On the same day, a telegram, in reply to his of the 13th, had been sent informing him that no tugs of the necessary dimensions were procurable in India or Burma and that stern-wheelers could not make the sea journey, as owing to their fragile construction, they would break up in the slightest sea.*

It is clear that up to this time the misunderstandings that had arisen between the authorities in India (military and marine) and General Nixon's headquarters had stood in the way of river craft being sent from India to Mesopotamia. It is impossible to say from the available records what the reasons were for this, i.e., whether, as alleged by the Indian authorities, General Nixon's staff were too rigid in their specifications and too sparing of other relevant information, or whether, as General Nixon's staff complained, the Indian Marine authorities were not sufficiently helpful.

The Indian Marine authorities took a little time to make out the required lists and it was not till the 10th November, in answer to an urgent reminder from General Nixon, that the Director of the Royal Indian Marine telegraphed his first list. This contained details of four paddle and six stern-wheeler steamers, all of which were accepted by General Nixon. These and others accepted during the next three or four weeks began to arrive at Basra—such of them as did not sink—in January 1916.

* In the next few months, out of twenty-four stern-wheelers sent to Mesopotamia seventeen sank *en route*.

Meanwhile, on the 3rd November, the India Office telegraphed the arrangements for delivery of the craft ordered, which showed that none of the steamers or tugs ordered would be ready to leave England before the middle of March 1916. This information was repeated to Mesopotamia.

By this time General Nixon had worked out his plans and had found that by supplementing his available river craft with *mahailas* he could put General Townshend's force into Baghdad. Here, his information told him, he could obtain large quantities of supplies,* some thousands of camels and donkeys, more *mahailas* and probably some of the Turkish steamers. In making this calculation he reckoned on being able to treat most of his wounded at Baghdad, which would free his river steamers to bring up from Basra the first reinforcements before other steamers reached him from India ; and as there were still no signs of any large Turkish reinforcements being on their way to Nur-ud-Din, there appeared to be no cause for anxiety.

It has already been related how the civil authorities in India had been unable to accept the political and commercial advantages urged as sufficient grounds for the construction of the railway from Basra to Nasiriya, which had been recommended by General Nixon in August ; and that the Finance Member of the Viceroy's Council had asked the Commander-in-Chief in India for his definite assurance that the project was absolutely necessary for the safeguarding of our military position.† On the 24th October, when his transport difficulties were very great, General Nixon, evidently realising what assistance this railway would be, asked India how the question stood.

The Commander-in-Chief had discussed the question with the Chief of the General Staff and had decided to let the proposal remain in abeyance until it became known whether the advance on Baghdad was to take place. On the 26th October, after receipt of General Nixon's reminder, Sir Percy Lake submitted the question for the Commander-in-Chief's orders with a memorandum by himself recommending the proposal. Sir Beauchamp Duff, however, decided that he could not give the required assurance. He considered that when General Nixon had been reinforced by the two divisions from France and the occupation of Baghdad had taken place, the demand for a railway to Nasiriya from Basra would have largely lost its force. In arriving at this conclusion, he took into consideration the

* Grain, fodder and firewood, which at that time absorbed more than half his river transport tonnage.

† Volume I., Chapter XII, p. 342.

time that must elapse before the railway could be completed and he decided that the advantages to be gained would not be commensurate with the expense involved. In consequence, on the 14th November, General Nixon was informed that the Government of India had decided not to proceed with the project on the ground of expense.*

Soon after his arrival at Kut at the end of September, the state of General Nixon's health obliged him to limit his personal activities; and he remained in indifferent health till he was invalided from Mesopotamia in January 1916. There is nothing to show that his state of health affected his general conduct of the campaign; nevertheless, the point has to be borne in mind. On the 19th October, his Chief General Staff Officer, Major-General Kemball, arrived at Aziziya from Kut, where General Nixon had established his headquarters, to discuss various questions with General Townshend. They dealt with the general military situation and with alternative plans of operation for the prospective advance or retirement, as might be ordered. In the course of the discussion General Townshend remarked that his men "were beginning to look over their shoulders," evidently meaning that they were nervous at their isolated position so far from Basra and at their weakness in numbers. General Kemball, however, told General Townshend in reply that unless reinforcements were promised the advance to Baghdad would not be undertaken; and he gathered that this reassured General Townshend, for he told the Mesopotamia Commission that neither at this, nor at any other subsequent interview had General Townshend expressed to him any doubt as to the advisability of continuing the advance. It had since, however, come to his knowledge (he informed the Commission) that General Townshend had written privately to individuals out of Mesopotamia calling in question the soundness of an advance on *strategical* grounds.

On the 23rd October, General Townshend's Intelligence Staff estimated from Arab reports that the Turkish strength south of Baghdad might now amount to 10,000 infantry, 3,000 cavalry and camelry and 33 to 35 guns; and that this included a third division, which had been raised since the battle of Kut and included the troops from the Euphrates. In point of fact, this division was the 45th, formed of the 3rd, 141st and 142nd Regiments. It had been raised in 1914, and was sent to

* In regard to this, General Cowper, senior administrative staff officer to General Nixon, told the Mesopotamia Commission that this was the only instance he knew when any request had been rejected on the score of expense.

Mesopotamia in August or September 1915. The exact composition of the regiments is uncertain ; and though some of the local troops and gendarmerie were incorporated in them, a part of the officers and men came from Anatolia and Syria and were better fighting material than that in most of the regiments which had hitherto fought against us in Mesopotamia.

At this period the local Arabs were as actively hostile to the British as they dared to be. Their attacks and raids on our line of communications—many of them carried out under Turkish direction or with Turkish assistance—were a source of constant trouble and General Townshend had frequently to supplement the weakness of the force guarding the line with detachments from his division at Aziziya.

On the night 23rd/24th October an incident occurred which led to the withdrawal from the 16th Infantry Brigade of the 20th Punjabis and to their replacement by the 66th Punjabis from the 12th Division at Amara. The Turks were making great efforts by propaganda to seduce Indian Mahomedan troops from their loyalty and at this particular period were making much capital out of the fact that the British were approaching the tomb of Suliman Pak,* a servant of the Prophet, which was one of the Islamic Holy Places. The Turkish propaganda had, however, no great effect. Whatever their religious scruples may have been, the Indian Mahomedans as a whole proved thoroughly loyal, the few exceptions being generally Pathans of trans-frontier tribes ; and they were not always swayed by purely religious factors. The 20th Punjabis had one and and a half companies of trans-frontier Pathans ; and, on the night in question, one of their Afridi sentries shot the other sentry and the non-commissioned officer of his piquet—both Sikhs†—and, pursued by the fire of the remainder of the piquet, deserted to the enemy with another Afridi.

By this date, certain drafts and reinforcements had reached General Townshend ; and more were on their way to him. But his force at Aziziya, amounting on the 24th to 7,179 effective rifles and sabres, was still below its proper establishment. Further drafts for Indian battalions, amounting to 1,800 men, were on their way from Kut ; and at Kut itself were 483 Indian infantry and 574 cavalry drafts and reinforcements. General Townshend's total fighting strength in infantry and cavalry

* It is close to the Arch of Ctesiphon.

† It was customary in Indian regiments enlisting different races to mix these races in all guards, piquets, etc., so as to minimise dangers, such as the one under discussion, arising from racial or religious scruples.

thus amounted to 9,316. It had been found necessary to detain at Kut a large part of the cavalry as well as many of the transport animals, until a sufficient reserve of fodder had been accumulated at Aziziya.

General Nixon received on the 24th October the sanction to advance on Baghdad,* and on the 26th General Townshend received from headquarters the following telegram: "Very secret. Army Commander has been promised reinforcements on a liberal scale and has been given discretion to advance as soon as he considers it desirable. He wishes advance on Baghdad to begin by November 14th, by which date the modified scale of transport with two days' rations should have reached you. Impossible to meet your full demands without incurring too great delay, but transport will continue to be pushed up from Basra by every available means. The 23rd Cavalry has been sent you as divisional cavalry and should reach you in ample time."

At this time, Mr. Chamberlain was doing all he could to get the Indian infantry divisions despatched from France at an early date; but Lord Kitchener decided that the requirements of the situation in the Near East must give other divisions precedence. Mr. Chamberlain also asked Lord Kitchener to send General Younghusband's 28th Indian Infantry Brigade at once from Egypt to reinforce General Nixon in Mesopotamia, with the idea that their place in Egypt could be taken by the reinforcements from France.† But Lord Kitchener found himself unable to agree to this at first, though finally orders reached General Younghusband on the 10th November to proceed with his brigade to Mesopotamia.

The situation of General Townshend's force at Aziziya at this time was anything but comfortable. The dust and flies were extremely trying and almost impossible to contend with; and there was much sickness from fever and from *beri-beri*. On the 26th October, a careful medical inspection of the British troops proved that many of the men were showing signs of their hard campaigning, and this applied particularly to the Norfolks, who could not turn out for the time being more than 400 effective soldiers.

On the night of the 27th/28th October, General Townshend moved out from Aziziya with the greater part of his force to attack the Turkish advanced detachment at Kutuniya. The enemy—whose strength was estimated at 1,000 Arab irregular

* See *ante*, p. 28.

† This brigade had returned to Egypt from Aden some weeks previously.

horsemen, 400 cavalry, 2 guns, 4 machine guns and an infantry battalion—was surprised in the early morning of the 28th, and retired rapidly in disorder. The British force suffered no casualties; and, after destroying the enemy's camp and fortified *serai*, returned to Aziziya.

In his telegraphic report to General Nixon, General Townshend expressed his disappointment at the Turks having managed to get their guns away, which he attributed to the rough ground having hampered his cavalry and horse artillery. From the examination of prisoners and from the Turkish disorderly retreat, he had come to the conclusion that the information he had received, i.e., that the Turkish troops at Zor were fresh from Anatolia and would not run, was incorrect; and the affair had proved an excellent experience for the recruits in the Indian battalions. He was specially pleased with the perfect silence, ease, and supple manoeuvres of the night march, which was the best he had ever seen. As an instance of this, he said that the force had passed close to two enemy watch-fires without being observed. He further expressed the opinion that it would be a good thing if he could get a British cavalry regiment for his cavalry brigade to give it the same backing as the British infantry battalions gave to his infantry brigades. His recent experience had shown him, he said, how invaluable was the presence of British troops in a hard fight.

On the 30th October, General Kemball again paid a visit to Aziziya and discussed with General Townshend the advance on Ctesiphon. He explained to General Townshend exactly what troops General Nixon could allot for the operations and he also discussed an alternative plan for the advance suggested by General Nixon. General Townshend, however, after full consideration of this plan preferred his own. On this date General Townshend's Intelligence Staff estimated the Turkish strength as being certainly 10,000 with 25 guns and possibly as much as 12,300 with 30 guns, but they were still uncertain as to the way in which the third of the Turkish divisions was organised.

In his final "project of operations," submitted to General Nixon on the 31st October, General Townshend stated that his principal object was to seek the bulk of the hostile force in the field, to destroy it, and then to occupy Baghdad. He gave the total of the hostile forces in the field as 10,900 combatants and 30 guns, of whom the bulk were on the left bank of the Tigris. Therefore, to march on his principal objective, he should advance from Aziziya by the left bank, which was also

the shortest route to gain his desired object, viz., to defeat the bulk of the hostile forces in the field and to occupy Baghdad. General Townshend further stated that his directing idea was to get Nur-ud-Din to fight him in the open if possible, "as a continuous campaign of attacking entrenchments lessens the men's keenness for battle."

He would first advance with his force concentrated and attack the Turkish covering force at Zor. If, as was to be expected, this Turkish detachment fell back on Ctesiphon, there would then be two courses open to him. He could either attack up the left bank, or, by throwing his bridge of boats across the Tigris some five miles west of Zor, he could move his force up the right bank. This would probably compel Nur-ud-Din to send the bulk of his force across the Tigris by the bridge of boats above Ctesiphon to the right bank, where the Turkish trenches only extended for about a mile in length. These trenches could be easily turned and in that case the greater part of the Turkish force would have to fight in the open. General Townshend preferred this advance up the right bank but, for the time being, he reserved his final decision.

On the 3rd November, General Nixon asked General Townshend if he could advance so as to make good Zor and the Lajj reach and get his bridge thrown across the Tigris by the 14th at latest, so as to make the attack at Ctesiphon on the 16th. The reason he gave for this was that it would probably finish the fighting before the 18th, the tenth day of the Mahomedan festival *Muharram*, when their religious code promises special rewards to faithful Moslems who die fighting the infidel. General Townshend, however, found himself unable to agree. Owing to unforeseen delays his concentration would not be quite complete,* and he had not yet decided whether he would operate up the right bank.

On the 5th, General Kemball again visited Aziziya and discussed very fully with General Townshend the whole of the coming operations. General Kemball told the Mesopotamia Commission that General Townshend appeared to be full of confidence at his ability to beat the Turks and expressed no misgivings. In regard to this feeling of confidence the evidence of General Cowper,† who joined General Nixon's staff as Deputy Adjutant and Quartermaster-General on the 4th November (vice General Hamilton appointed to command the

* The *Shamal* (the seasonal northerly wind) had continued for longer than usual and had much delayed the *mahailas* in their sail upstream.

† Major-General M. Cowper, C.B., C.I.E.

18th Infantry Brigade*) is specially noteworthy, as he was a new-comer. He informed the Mesopotamia Commission that on his arrival he was impressed greatly by the generally expressed opinion that we should beat the Turks at Ctesiphon and capture Baghdad and also by the high *moral* of the rank and file.

On the 7th November, General Townshend received a telegram from General Kemball saying that General Nixon quite approved General Townshend's general ideas and that Force Headquarters would shortly be moving up to Aziziya. On the same day General Townshend telegraphed that, owing to the delay in arrival of ships to which he was tied, it was not practicable for him to start his advance before the 15th.† Further, his land transport would only arrive from Kut on the 13th and would require a day's rest before starting.‡ General Nixon was much averse to this delay and pointed out that permission had been given on the 24th October to carry out the advance and he feared that His Majesty's Government would consider the delay to be very great. Our interests and our duty to our country were, he said, to get on without undue delay.

Although there was a good deal of minor fighting, no operations of importance took place in the vicinity of Aziziya during the first ten days in November. Everything possible was done to accelerate the concentration of troops, transport and supplies at Aziziya, but navigation became no easier and led to exasperating delays.§ It was found impossible to induce many of the *mahailas* to proceed upstream of Kut and it became apparent that General Townshend would be fortunate if he was able to start as soon as had been hoped for.

At the same time, Arab reports showed a daily increasing tendency to give what appeared to be an exaggerated account of coming Turkish reinforcements; for these reports were not definite and lacked confirmation. Information from other usually reliable sources was as follows: Major Marsh, the British liaison officer with the Russian Caucasus Army, had reported on the 1st November that about 3,000 Turkish troops

* Vice General Fry invalided.

† The grounding in the river of different vessels not only delayed their own arrival, but also generally blocked all the river traffic.

‡ Owing to the delay in the arrival of the *mahailas* carrying supplies (due to the continuance of the *Shamal*) the transport animals, escorted by the 30th Brigade, could not leave Kut till the 8th, 9th and 10th November, the last party reaching Aziziya on the 14th.

§ It is noteworthy that the "P" class of steamers were still managing to get up as far as Kut.

had been sent from Bitlis towards Mosul and that there was at Bitlis a Turkish force, some 7,800 or 8,000 strong, under the command of Halil Bey,* which might be intended to reinforce Baghdad. This information reached General Nixon, via London and India, on the 4th November. He had received on the 2nd from British Headquarters in Egypt intimation that their information indicated a general Turkish movement in the direction of Baghdad; and on the 4th one of his local agents had reported the arrival at Baghdad, between the 23rd and 26th October, of 8,000 Turks with twelve guns under the command of Halil Bey, which was said to be the advanced portion of a larger force. On the 7th November, however, Major Marsh reported information from a reliable source that none of the troops he had mentioned on the 1st had yet left Bitlis. A further report of Major Marsh's of the 8th, which reached General Nixon on the 11th, said that 15,000 Turkish troops had recently begun to leave Mosul† for Baghdad, and that it was difficult to decide in what direction Halil Bey was moving. Major Marsh also confirmed the report that the troops he had mentioned on the 1st November had not yet left Bitlis. There were at this time other reports, which were discredited, of a Turkish force some 15,000 to 20,000 strong having reached Dair-es-Zor,‡ on the Euphrates, from Syria at the beginning of October.

Taking into consideration all these reports, in conjunction with the fact that recent reconnaissances by aeroplanes reported that there were no troops to speak of in Baghdad, General Nixon's Intelligence Staff came to the conclusion that the reinforcements indicated had not yet reached Baghdad; and they estimated that the Turkish regular forces opposing General Townshend on the Tigris amounted to three infantry divisions, two cavalry and one camelry regiments, and thirty-eight guns, giving a total of some 12,000 combatants.

The air force at Aziziya at the beginning of October consisted of three aeroplanes under Major H. L. Reilly, and the first reconnaissance flight over Baghdad took place on the 6th October. During the next three weeks two of the naval seaplanes were converted into land machines and were flown successfully as such. By the 5th November reinforcements of

* Halil Bey was known to have recently been in command of the 3rd Composite Division and from this it was deduced that this force at Bitlis might be larger than a division or might include the 3rd Division.

† Mosul was reported to be a Turkish training centre for recruits and reservists.

‡ Over 400 miles to the north-west of Baghdad

the Royal Flying Corps with four "B.E.2.C" aeroplanes reached Basra and the aviation unit in Mesopotamia was reorganised as No. 30 Squadron R.F.C., consisting of Headquarters, "A" and "B" Flights, and No. 4 Aircraft Park. Reconnaissance flights over Baghdad continued until the 13th November, when an aeroplane, sent to cut the telegraph lines north and west of Baghdad, was damaged in landing and was captured by the Turks. General Nixon, who arrived with his headquarters that day at Aziziya, hearing of the loss and fearing further losses among his few aeroplanes, gave orders that no more long-distance reconnaissances were to be undertaken. Thus, at a time when reliable information regarding the arrival of Turkish reinforcements was particularly desirable, he felt obliged, owing to the small number of aeroplanes at his disposal, to limit those he had to local reconnaissance.

On the 11th November, General Townshend started his advance by despatching General Hamilton with the advanced guard, consisting of the Cavalry Brigade, the 63rd Field Battery and the 18th Infantry Brigade—accompanied on the river by the armed tug *Sumana*—to occupy Kutuniya and to reconnoitre Baghdadiya* and Zor. By the 13th the concentration of General Townshend's force at and in advance of Aziziya—consisting of the Cavalry Brigade, the 6th Division, and the 30th Infantry Brigade—was almost complete. The total strength of this force on the 14th amounted to about 14,000† combatants with thirty-five guns and five aeroplanes.‡ The naval flotilla consisted of the *Firefly*,** *Comet*, *Shaitan* and *Sumana* and four 4·7-inch naval guns in horseboats towed by the *Shushan* and *Mahsoudi*, each of which mounted a *pom-pom* and a maxim. Owing to the difficulties of navigation, the low state of the Tigris and its high banks, the role of the naval flotilla was much circumscribed; and they could no longer afford the army the same assistance as in former operations.

The river steamers at General Townshend's disposal consisted of the steamers *Mejidieh*, *Blosse Lynch*, *Mosul*, *Julnar*, *Salimi*

* Not to be confused with Baghdad. See Map 8.

† For details, see Appendix IX.

‡ Two of these were converted naval seaplanes. On the 17th two more aeroplanes arrived bringing the total up to seven.

** H.M.S. *Firefly* was the first of the new river gunboats, which had been sent out from England in sections and were being put together at Abadan. She was completed and left Basra for the front on the 2nd November, reaching Aziziya on the 9th. She carried a crew of 17 men, all told. Her armament consisted of one 4-inch gun, one 6-pounder and two maxims. With a draught not exceeding 2½ feet, she could travel 7 knots against the Tigris stream, except in flood time, when she could only do 3–4 knots.

and three tugs. Of these the *Mejidieh* was utilised by General Townshend as his headquarters,* while the *Blosse Lynch* and *Mosul* were prepared as hospital steamers, to accommodate 800 and 700 cases respectively.† The *Malamir* conveyed General Nixon and his headquarters. Seven supply barges had been provided to accompany the force and an eighth barge, loaded with two days' supplies for men and animals, was to be left at Aziziya. The force was to start its advance from Aziziya with a total of eighteen days' rations accompanying it.

The land transport consisted of 1,000 mules, 620 camels, 660 carts and 240 donkeys. The carts had to be used to carry water for the force, bring supplies and ammunition up to them and to evacuate the wounded. In addition, General Townshend utilised many of them during the ensuing battle to carry a battalion of infantry with a flying column. It will thus be seen that there were none too many available. Only sufficient bullocks to draw two out of his six heavy guns had been brought up before the battle.

Six small launches had been allotted to the Bridging Train for towing their pontoons and *danaks*; these launches were sufficiently powerful, but drew over four feet of water and frequently went aground in consequence. On the 16th November, General Nixon inspected the bridge which was thrown across at Kutuniya, and enquired whether the *danaks*, of which the bridge was mainly composed, were as suitable as pontoons and was told that they were not. He asked the officer commanding the train why, in that case, he did not have pontoons instead, and was told that only eighteen pontoons were authorised. General Nixon at once telegraphed to India for fifty more pontoons, which the officer commanding said would give him what he required.

General Nixon's endeavours had been directed at concentrating the greatest possible number of men at the decisive point, i.e., Aziziya; and the success he attained in this respect is shown by the numbers of British combatant troops elsewhere in Mesopotamia.‡ In addition to the 14,000 men with thirty-five guns at and in advance of Aziziya, there were at

* From Kutuniya onwards General Townshend and his staff marched with the troops on land, the *Mejidieh* being only used as his headquarters as occasion demanded.

† General Townshend's staff estimated the probable number of wounded at 2,400. Of these the majority were expected, from previous experience, to be slight cases and would be taken in the ration barges and steamers going to Baghdad. The worst cases were to remain at Ctesiphon, under a guard, until steamers to fetch them up could be sent back from Baghdad.

‡ For details of units, see Appendix X.

Kut about 1,000 men with four guns, at Ali Gharbi 150 men with one gun, and Amara was held by about 1,000 men with seven guns; while there were also small posts at Qala Salih and Qurna of 25 and 150 men respectively. On the Euphrates line, Nasiriya was garrisoned by about 2,000 men with ten guns, and there was a detachment of about 150 men at Akaika. Some 800 men were in Arabistan and about 1,500 with seven guns were at Bushire; and Basra was left with a garrison of 700 men and two guns. Owing to the large number of men whom it had been found necessary to employ extra-regimentally, the effective strengths present with all units were much below their paper establishments. In addition to the above numbers the 14th Hussars were on their way to Mesopotamia from India, having been sent in response to General Nixon's urgent request for a British cavalry regiment.

On the 15th November, General Townshend moved a further part of his force from Aziziya to Kutuniya.* It had been his intention to concentrate the whole of his force at Kutuniya on the 15th, occupy Zor on the 16th, Lajj on the 17th, carry out necessary reconnaissances on the 18th, and attack the Turks at Ctesiphon on the 19th. Owing, however, to the delay in arrival of four of his river steamers he was unable to concentrate his force at Kutuniya till the 18th. A small garrison was left at Aziziya, consisting of half the 24th Punjabis, a hundred convalescents unable to march, two 4-inch heavy guns of the 104th Battery (for which there were no bullocks) and one 15-pounder field gun of the Volunteer Battery. So far General Townshend's force had only met with slight opposition, and that mainly from Arabs.

On the 18th General Townshend issued orders for the advance next morning to Zor, where the Turkish covering force was estimated to be 4,000 strong. His intention was to move the bulk of his force along the left bank of the river, while the 17th Infantry Brigade moved along the right bank,—accompanying the ships—and attacked Jumaisa fort and village. This place, which was strongly held by Arabs with a few Turkish cavalry and a couple of guns, barred the passage of the ships at a dangerous loop in the river.

In the evening, however, after the orders had been issued, news came in from air reconnaissances that considerable bodies of Turks were moving forward along both banks of the river from Ctesiphon to Zor.

* General Nixon with his headquarters also moved to Kutuniya.

It appeared to General Townshend that the Turks might intend attacking him and, as his boat-bridge had just been dismantled in anticipation of next day's advance and thus left the 17th Brigade isolated on the right bank, he gave orders for the bridge to be reconstructed immediately.* He also cancelled the orders for the advance of the 17th Brigade, who were now to entrench themselves opposite Kutuniya to cover the shipping, while the remainder of his force were to carry out his original orders and advance up the left bank.†

Meanwhile, General Nixon had received further news of Turkish reinforcements.‡ On the 14th November, Egypt telegraphed their opinion that a Turkish division had left Syria for the East; and they followed this up next day with a telegram to the effect that during the six weeks preceding the 29th September nearly 15,000 men with 8 guns had left Syria for Baghdad. On the 16th the War Office telegraphed: ". . . . Reliable and authentic information has been received that a Turkish expedition is on its way to Baghdad;" and again the next day: "We have reliable information that von der Goltz left for Baghdad on 10th November. Halil Bey, the uncle of Enver Pasha, is marching from Erzerum with 30,000 men to Iraq . . . ." On this day also India telegraphed that reliable information had been received from England to the effect that von der Goltz had been appointed to the command of all the Turkish forces between the Persian Gulf and the southern shores of Lake Van, to be organised into a new Army numbered Six. Von der Goltz, they said, was also charged with the conduct of Turco-Persian activity in Persia, the organisation of the movement there against Great Britain and Russia, and the creation of a Persian army. In another telegram of the same day, India informed General Nixon of a report by Major Marsh, considered reliable, that a force under Halil Bey, including the 3rd Composite Division, had left Bitlis about the 16th October for Baghdad.§ On the 18th November India

* This was done in the record time of 3½ hours.

† According to the Turkish account of the operations, the forces seen advancing from Ctesiphon were merely troops moving to relieve the advanced regiment at Zor.

‡ It should be borne in mind that only a brief summary of part of the information which reached General Nixon from many different sources is given here. Much of the remainder was contradictory and most of it was indefinite. Moreover, ever since Force "D" had been in Mesopotamia, reports of large Turkish reinforcements had been continuous and had for the most part proved untrue.

§ Compare this with news, mentioned before, from Major Marsh in the beginning of November concerning the movements of this force. Bitlis to Baghdad is approximately 420 miles.

sent another report, from Russian sources, saying there were 50,000 Turks in Baghdad, but adding that the Russian agent considered this number to be an exaggeration. On this day also the Chief of the General Staff, India, wired privately to General Nixon that it was evident from accumulating information that a strong enemy force was concentrating against him; and Sir Percy Lake asked how long notice General Nixon's intelligence could be relied upon to give him before a strong force of the enemy could reach Baghdad. On the 17th November Sir Beauchamp Duff had suggested to the Viceroy the advisability of despatching at once the "Emergency Force"* from India to reinforce General Nixon, to meet the possibility of an early arrival of large Turkish reinforcements. Lord Hardinge, however, in view of the uncertainty of the information, deprecated such action, but gave the Commander-in-Chief permission to despatch this force provided the situation demanded it.

The movement up the left bank of the Tigris commenced early on the 19th November, and Zor was occupied with only slight opposition. The 17th Brigade and the shipping were then sent for and at about 9 p.m. reached Zor, where a boat-bridge was thrown across the river early next morning.† The 17th Brigade then crossed over to the left bank and followed the main force, which, with the exception of two battalions of the 30th Brigade and two guns, had advanced to Lajj. These two battalions and two guns were left in the loop of the river near Jumaisa to cover the passage of the ships, but rejoined the main force next day at Lajj.

While at Zor, General Townshend decided to give up any idea of advancing up the right bank. The reports he had received showed that the ground on the right bank south of Ctesiphon was rough, much intersected with large water channels, and interspersed with thick scrub. Moreover, he had come to the conclusion that he could obtain more decisive results on the left bank. The bulk of the enemy's force lay here between two unfordable rivers, the Tigris and the Diyala, and his few boat-bridges‡ would not avail him much in a disorderly retreat.

At Lajj, General Townshend made his final preparations for the attack on the Turkish position at Ctesiphon. General Nixon and his headquarters in the *Malamir* had accompanied

* See *ante*, p. 31.
† Being a long span, this bridge took some six hours to construct.
‡ One across the Tigris, two across the Diyala.

General Townshend's advance and both staffs were in constant communication. While here, General Townshend received what appeared to be reliable information that considerable Turkish reinforcements had arrived at Baghdad or south of it, and he sent his aide-de-camp, Captain Bastow, to enquire from General Nixon if he had any intelligence confirmatory of this. But General Nixon said to the aide-de-camp: "Tell Charles (i.e., General Townshend) that I do not believe a word of it." In his (Nixon's) estimation the Turkish force was only about 13,000 strong.

On the 20th November General Nixon telegraphed to the War Office, with reference to their telegram of the 17th, that for more than a fortnight past his own agents had been giving him similar information of a large force under von der Goltz, but that for the present he did not, for various reasons, accept these reports as conclusive. On the same day he replied privately to the private telegram of the 18th from the Chief of the General Staff, India. So long as he was some distance away from Baghdad, said General Nixon, he could not prevent small enemy parties arriving at Baghdad. If these small parties were portions of a larger force, he calculated that he would receive a fortnight's notice before that force could concentrate at Baghdad. By "large force" General Nixon meant one sufficiently strong to lead him to reconsider his plans regarding an advance to Baghdad. General Nixon added that when he reached Baghdad he would be in a position to destroy such small parties and thus to prevent piecemeal advances, and that he could then calculate on obtaining still earlier notice of any enemy concentration in force. General Nixon went on to say that there were certainly strong indications that the Turks intended to send large forces against him, but beyond those troops at the moment facing him at Ctesiphon, there were no such forces of whose presence within striking distance he had proof.

On the 21st General Townshend called for two reconnaissances from Major Reilly commanding his Air Force, one of the Ctesiphon position and another of Baghdad and its vicinity. These were the first long reconnaissances since General Nixon's order of the 13th. The reconnaissance of the Ctesiphon position was carried out in the morning and the observer reported practically no change. Major Reilly himself undertook the reconnaissance of Baghdad and left in the afternoon. Taking a straight course towards Baghdad over the desert to the eastward of the Ctesiphon position, he climbed to a safe

height (about 6,000 feet) and arrived at about four miles east of the Ctesiphon position, which had already been reconnoitred. From here, however, he observed a distinct alteration in the enemy's dispositions. The enemy's position consisted of two main lines, one to the south of the Arch of Ctesiphon and the other well to the north of it. From its appearance it appeared obvious to Major Reilly that considerable reinforcements had arrived at the northerly camp. He decided, therefore, to postpone his reconnaissance to Baghdad and to examine the Ctesiphon area. As soon as his aeroplane arrived over the northerly camp his engine was put out of action by a Turkish gun, and he glided out into the desert with a view to walking back. But he could not avoid the Arabs and was captured.

The Turkish account * of this incident says: "An aeroplane flying at a height of 1,000 metres in a last attempt to examine our line of defence and rear was brought down and captured by means of machine gun fire from the 51st Division. This little event was taken for a happy omen that the luck of the enemy was about to change. . . . . The presence of the 51st Division, which turned the balance of success against the assailants in this battle (Ctesiphon) was ascertained in this fruitless reconnaissance and was shown on the airman's map. But the map containing this priceless information fell, not into the hands of the enemy commander . . . . but into those of the Turkish commander. . . . . Major Reilly's greatest gift to us was the sketch showing the course of the Tigris from the Diyala to Aziziya. This little sketch, probably of small account to the enemy, was an important map in the eyes of the Iraq Command. For at headquarters and with the troops there was not such a thing as a map . . . ."

It is impossible to say what course events would have taken if Major Reilly had returned in safety with his important information. General Townshend was so close to the enemy that a withdrawal without fighting might not have been possible, even if it had been deemed politic. That General Nixon or General Townshend would have persisted in the projected attack against an entrenched position held by a force now so obviously superior in numbers seems improbable. The question is one of purely academic interest, and as such we must leave it to others to discuss. It is certain, however, that Major Reilly's capture was the first of a series of untoward events which led to great disaster.

* "The Battle of Suliman Pak," by Staff Bimbashi Muhammad Amin, published by the Turkish General Staff, and translated for the Historical Section, Committee of Imperial Defence, by Brigadier-General U. W. Evans, C.B., C.M.G.

Two other British aeroplanes were lost on this and the next day, reducing the number remaining to four; and of these only two were found fit for action in the battle of Ctesiphon.

On the night of the 21st/22nd November General Nixon sent a long telegram to India regarding the possible organisation of a Turkish Sixth Army under von der Goltz. He enumerated nine divisions and four or five cavalry brigades which might form this army; and he considered that, owing to the approach of winter in the mountainous country of the Caucasus front, the Turks might be induced to withdraw the divisions he had mentioned from there. But he said that up to date no reliable information had reached him of the arrival within striking distance of his own force of any such heavy reinforcements; and he was unaware of the Turks having any formidable addition to their strength either at, or downstream of, Mosul and Dair-es-Zor.

His estimate of the Turkish force at Ctesiphon was that it consisted of some 13,000 regular infantry with 38 guns. These numbers were based on the supposition that there were three and a half Turkish divisions present, each numbering about 4,000 rifles. The Turkish account shows that the 51st Division, consisting of the 7th, 9th and 44th Regiments (each three battalions strong) had arrived at Baghdad some days before and that seven of its nine battalions had reached the Ctesiphon area by the 17th November, bringing the Turkish strength in rifles up to about 18,000, exclusive of Arab irregulars and also exclusive of regular and irregular cavalry and camelry. It was, moreover, not only in regard to numbers that General Nixon and his staff had been misled. The 45th Division was superior and the 51st Division greatly superior to the 35th and 38th Divisions in fighting efficiency.*

Meanwhile, in Persia, the situation had shown no improvement. The German importation of arms continued, the Persian gendarmerie were still actively hostile to British consular officials, there were signs of the formation of a new national Persian army to be officered by German and Turkish nominees, Austrian prisoners of war were being smuggled into Tehran from Trans-Caspia by Persian officials, and the few provincial governors who tried to check the activities of German agents met with no support from the Persian Government.

* Colonel W. H. Beach, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., who was head of the Intelligence Branch in Mesopotamia for most of the campaign, has been good enough to write a note on the Intelligence arrangements, which is reproduced as Appendix XXX.

In Fars the situation was such that the British Consul at Shiraz telegraphed to Mr. Marling, the British Minister at Tehran, that unless the Persian Government took immediately vigorous steps to set matters right, it would be impossible for British officials to remain there at all. Everything seemed to indicate an arrangement between the German and Persian Governments, which would bring Persia into the war on the German side. The Russians landed more troops at Enzeli in the Caspian and the British and Russian Ministers made formal protests in writing to the Persian Government. But, although the Persian Ministers in reply gave the Allied Ministers assurances that they had no intention of joining the Germans, they actually took few, if any, measures to stop German hostile activities.

Captain Muhammad Amin Bey, at this time on Nur-ud-Din's General Staff, says in his pamphlet "Baghdad and the Story of its Last Fall"* :—"Germany had decided before the war to venture into the East and into the field of Islam and after the declaration of war . . . . her policy was pushed boldly forward . . . . The first sign was the proposal on 22nd September, 1915, to Goltz Pasha, then commanding the First Army, to intervene in the affairs of Persia. About three weeks later Goltz took charge of all German and Turkish interests from Lake Van to Basra and the Sixth Army came into being."

* Translated for the Historical Section, Committee of Imperial Defence, under the direction of the General Staff, India, by Captain G.O. De R. Channer, M.C., 7th Gurkha Rifles.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BATTLE OF CTESIPHON—THE FIRST DAY'S OPERATIONS.

(SEE MAP 9.)

IN its sinuous course below its junction with the Diyala river, the Tigris, flowing in a southerly direction from near Qusaiba, passes between the sites of ancient Ctesiphon and still more ancient Seleucia. The only signs remaining on the left bank of the former splendour and importance of this area are a ruined fragment of the palace and arch of Chosroes and the "High Wall." But there are still many irregular mounds on both banks to mark the sites of ancient buildings or the banks of ancient canals.

The ruined Arch of Ctesiphon, rearing its head some ninety-five feet above the plain—a fine example of Sassanian architecture—is still the most prominent feature in the landscape. The "High Wall," another outstanding landmark, is situated a little over a mile north-westward of Bustan and consists of two narrow ridges or mounds of earth running at right angles to one another for some six hundred yards southward and four hundred yards eastward. Rising to a height of forty or fifty feet in places, its base is about two hundred feet thick and marked approximately the centre of the main Turkish line of defence.

In olden days the area had seen much fighting and during the first six centuries of the Christian era Ctesiphon had been captured and plundered on more than one occasion by Roman or Arab. In A.D. 637 it fell finally to Omar and his Arabs, who reduced it to ashes and dust.

Before 1912, the southerly course of the Tigris continued for about eleven miles below Qusaiba before turning northward to Bustan and then southward towards Lajj.* In 1912, however, the Turks made a cut through the narrowest part of the peninsula about seven miles below Qusaiba, thus changing the course of the river and eliminating a bend that had been particularly difficult and dangerous for navigation. At this "cut" the Turkish main line of defence crossed the Tigris.

* What is here termed Lajj is the position of the British camp on the 21st November, 1915. Qusaiba, Bustan and Lajj were merely small collections of Arab huts.

THE ARCH OF CTESIPHON. (Aeroplane post-war photograph).

To face page 62.

Muhammad Amin, the Turkish historian, lays emphasis on the importance and value to the Turks of the time afforded to them after the British pursuit had halted at Aziziya on the 5th October and until the advance on Ctesiphon began. He describes how Nur-ud-Din utilised this period to improve the condition of his ill-trained and ill-disciplined troops and to prepare fortified positions; and how it enabled Turkish reinforcements to arrive in the nick of time. As shown, however, in the preceding chapter this delay was, for the British, unavoidable, being occasioned to a great extent by the undue continuance of the *Shamal*.

The fortified positions prepared by the Turks consisted of three main lines; two being in the area between Bustan and Qusaiba and the third along the Diyala river. Of these three lines, the first and most southerly one had been most carefully prepared and strengthened; the second, which lay to the north of the Arch of Ctesiphon, had received less attention; and the Diyala line was also very incomplete.

That portion of the Turkish first line which lay on the right bank of the Tigris extended from the "cut" at first southwards along the western bank of the old course of the river for about one and a half miles and then westward along a line of mounds for another one and a half miles; and behind its northern end were emplacements for two field, and one heavy, batteries. An advanced position, consisting of half a mile of infantry trench and two battery emplacements, was located at the northern end of the island formed by the old and new courses of the river. Muhammad Amin states that the Turks, regarding this part of their line as of secondary importance, had expended less work on the entrenchments here than on the remainder of their first line, and that there were no wire entanglements on the right bank.

On the left bank, the line extended for over six miles in a north-easterly direction following generally a line of a few low mounds. It consisted of a series of fifteen closed redoubts at from four hundred to six hundred yards interval—connected by a continuous line of trench. All the redoubts and entrenchments were low-sited without overhead cover and were invisible except at the closest ranges, and, except for about a mile of length at the southern end, were well protected by wire entanglements. Two redoubts situated on low mounds at the extreme northern end of the line (termed "Vital Point," or "V.P.," by General Townshend) were considered by the Turks to be exceptionally strong.

The southern half of the line was covered by the Tigris, which flowed parallel to the line of trenches and was separated from it by a stretch of flat sand about a thousand yards wide.*

In front of the northern half, the open plain, covered in a few places by low scrub two to three feet high, afforded the defenders an excellent field of fire.† In the northern half also, communication trenches led back from the front line to reserve positions in rear; and though in the southern half a few reserve trenches had been dug, there were no communication trenches leading to them.

The communication trenches that had been dug are, however, described in the Turkish account as being insufficient both in depth and width, difficult for the movement of single men and not practicable for animals.

Emplacements for six and a half field batteries had been prepared in various positions behind the front line on the left bank, the greater part being at the northern end of the line; and there was an emplacement for a heavy battery between "High Wall" and the Ctesiphon Arch.

A good supply of water to the northern portions of the line had been ensured by the installation of a pump on the river bank near the Ctesiphon Court House. This fed a channel which distributed water along several divergent tributaries to tanks in the different reserve positions.

As already mentioned, the Turkish second line position had not been properly prepared for defence. Like their first line, to which it ran roughly parallel at a distance varying from two to just over three miles, it lay astride the Tigris. The defences on the right bank consisted of a line of trenches some two miles long and included three redoubts. On the left bank the line of defence followed the course of an ancient canal, marked by a line of low mounds, and extended for some four or five miles with its northern extremity bending backwards. This part of the position was never, according to the Turkish account, reached by the British and our knowledge of its conditions is very limited. ‡

* In this stretch of river the Turks had made an obstruction with several sunken vessels behind a line of mines.

† Part of this scrub near their trenches had been burnt by the Turks.

‡ Most British accounts of the battle state that a part of General Townshend's force did penetrate into this second line, but a detailed comparison of our records and the Turkish account does not confirm this and rather makes it appear probable that the entrenchments taken by the British as belonging to the second line were reserve positions, battery emplacements and dry water channels roughly entrenched at the time by their occupants.

The sole Turkish communication across the Tigris within the Ctesiphon area was a boat-bridge in rear of their second line and north-west of Ctesiphon village.

In the Turkish account, the siting of these two positions is severely criticised. It is pointed out that the Turkish line of retreat lay in rear of the flank which was most exposed to envelopment, as the Tigris—passable only by the solitary boat-bridge—effectually barred retreat in any other direction. Muhammad Amin attributes the selection of them to the existence of the two lines of low mounds along which the trenches were laid; and he condemns this old-fashioned desire for placing defences on commanding ground in preference to the invisible and low-sited trenches which he considers modern warfare demands. In his opinion, the first line would have been better located running roughly north-east from Bustan and the second north-east from Qusaiba. In such a position their lines of retreat would have been at right angles to their lines of defence and free of obstacles. Moreover, such lines would not, he considers, have been too close to one another (as he considers the existing ones were) and would have afforded ample room for manoeuvre.

The Turkish combatant strength at Ctesiphon on the 21st November amounted to 400 cavalry (Iraq Cavalry Brigade), two regiments of camelry, 52 guns,* about 18,000 regular infantry,† 19 machine guns, two ancient mortars and a few thousand Arabs organised in two tribal brigades under retired Turkish officers.

The Turkish account says that although the 35th and 38th Divisions were in better condition than they had been at Kut, their *moral* was not good; but the 51st Division had a fine fighting reputation, being composed of Anatolian Turks, and the 45th Division also included some good material.

Nur-ud-Din organised his defence into two separate commands, the conduct of the defence on the right bank being

* 33 field guns, including 8 quick-firing guns with 51st Division and one captured British 18-pounder, 12 mountain guns (6 quick-firing with 51st Division) and 7 heavy guns.

† Approximate strength was (according to Turkish account):—

35th Division (three battalions 103rd Regiment, two battalions each 104th and 105th Regiments)—3,800 rifles.

38th Division (three battalions each 112th, 113th and 114th Regiments)—3,100 rifles.

45th Division (three battalions each 3rd, 141st and 142nd Regiments)—6,300 rifles.

51st Division (three battalions each 7th, 9th and 44th Regiments)—5,800 rifles.

Two battalions of the 51st Division did not reach the battlefield till the 23rd November, and a deduction has been made on this account in the estimate of 18,000.

entrusted to the officer commanding the 35th Division, while the whole of the defences on the left bank were placed under the 51st Divisional Commander, Muhammad Ali Bey.

The troops allotted to the right bank defence were the seven battalions of the 35th Division, with eight field and three heavy guns and one of the Arab tribal brigades. Three battalions occupied the front line trenches while four battalions remained in reserve. The three heavy guns occupied the position on the "island" and the Arab tribal brigade was posted on the extreme right flank.

On the left bank, the Turkish first line was divided into four approximately equal sectors, of which the southern three were held by the 38th Division, which had the six battalions of the 112th and 113th Regiments in the front line and the 114th Regiment as divisional reserve posted at the eastern exit of Ctesiphon village. The northern sector was entrusted to the 45th Division, which had two battalions of the 142nd Regiment in the front line, one battalion of that regiment in local reserve in rear of "V.P." and the six battalions of the 3rd and 141st Regiments as divisional reserve in rear of the left flank, just in front of the Turkish second line of defence. The Turkish account gives the artillery posted in this part of the line as one heavy and four field batteries, all of four guns each.* The heavy battery was eastward of the Arch, there was a field battery in two emplacements behind "High Wall," another behind "Water Redoubt" and two more behind "V.P."

The Iraq Cavalry Brigade with one camel regiment were posted in the open in the rear of the extreme left flank; and the 51st Division—consisting of seven infantry battalions, a machine gun company, a company of engineers and fourteen quick-firing field and mountain guns—formed at Qusaiba the General Reserve.

The second Arab tribal brigade with one camel regiment was in occupation of the Diyala river line of defence.

Taking the Turkish figures, the above distribution gave Nur-ud-Din the following approximate strength in rifles and guns: on the right bank, 3,800 rifles and 11 guns; on the left bank, 9,400 rifles and 20 guns; and in general reserve 4,600 rifles and 14 guns. The seven guns unaccounted for may have been in the Diyala defensive line.

* In the Turkish account nothing is said regarding the location during the battle of one of the mountain batteries or of the captured British 18-pounder gun.

The Turkish intelligence organisation seems to have been indifferent and Nur-ud-Din's headquarters had estimated General Townshend's force as about 20,000 strong. Turkish headquarters laboured under the disadvantage, says Muhammad Amin, of possessing no maps of the country, and in consequence were more often confused than assisted by reports mentioning by name localities of whose position they were ignorant.

At 1.30 p.m. on the 21st November, General Townshend issued his operation orders for the next day's battle. The information he had received* from his aerial and cavalry reconnaissance on that and the previous day showed no material change in the numbers or dispositions of the enemy, whose probable strength had been given him by General Nixon's staff as about 13,000 with 38 guns. In his orders General Townshend gave the enemy's estimated strength at 10,000 to 11,000 with 30 guns; and in his book he explains that he purposely gave the lowest estimate of the Turkish strength in order not to dishearten his troops.

He indicated the probable Turkish distribution as 3,500 on the right bank, 1,500 to 2,500 holding the front line of trenches on the left bank, and 4,000 to 5,000 in reserve at Qusaiba destined to occupy the second line of trenches some two miles north of the first line. A sketch map, prepared as the result of aerial reconnaissance, had been issued to subordinate commanders and gave a fairly accurate representation of the enemy entrenchments.

For the battle General Townshend organised his troops in four bodies, which he designated columns "A," "B," "C," and "Flying Column."

Column "A" under Major-General Delamain comprised :—

16th Infantry Brigade† .. { 2/Dorsetshire.
104th Rifles.

30th Composite Brigade† { 24th Punjabis (less half battalion).
2/7th Gurkhas.
66th Punjabis.
117th Mahrattas.

82nd Battery, R.F.A. (6 guns).
1/5th Hants Howitzer Battery (4 guns).
Half 22nd Company, Sappers and Miners.

* The capture of Major Reilly's aeroplane has been described in the previous chapter.

† The 30th Composite Brigade was formed under Colonel S. H. Climo (24th Punjabis) on the 21st and included two battalions of the 16th Brigade (66th and 117th) and one and a half battalions (2/7th and 24th) of the 30th Brigade. Half the 24th Punjabis were garrisoning Aziziya.

Column "B" under Brig.-General Hamilton comprised :—

18th Infantry Brigade ..
- 2/Norfolk.
- 7th Rajputs.
- 110th Mahrattas.
- 120th Infantry.

63rd Battery, R.F.A. (6 guns).
Half 22nd Company, Sappers and Miners.
It was accompanied by one pack wireless set.

Column "C" under Brig.-General Hoghton comprised :—

17th Infantry Brigade ..
- 1/Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.
- 22nd Punjabis.
- 103rd Mahrattas (less half battalion*.)
- 119th Infantry.

76th Battery, R.F.A. (6 guns).
86th Heavy Battery, R.G.A. (one section, i.e., 2 guns).
17th Company, Sappers and Miners.
48th Pioneers.†
One squadron 23rd Cavalry (Divisional Cavalry) ;
and was accompanied by one pack wireless set.

The "Flying Column" under Major-General Melliss ‡ comprised :—

6th Cavalry Brigade ..
- "S" Battery, R.H.A. (6 guns)
- 7th Lancers (four squadrons)
- 16th Cavalry (three squadrons)
- 33rd Cavalry (three squadrons)

Maxim Battery.
Motor machine gun section (two armoured cars and two lorries).
76th Punjabis (equipped with sufficient Army transport carts to carry half the battalion at a time) ;
and was accompanied by one pack wireless set.

All four columns were provided with a proportion of medical units.

In his "General Instructions" General Townshend explained that his plan followed in principle the instructions in the "Field Service Regulations §" :—"Broadly speaking, success in battle may be sought by means of a converging movement

* This half battalion was detailed to guard the shipping at Lajj.

† The 48th Pioneers formed part of the 17th Infantry Brigade during the battle of Ctesiphon. The half battalion 103rd Mahrattas was not engaged on the 22nd November, being utilised on transport escort duties.

‡ General Mellis was commander of the original 30th Brigade and had been specially selected for this duty.

§ Field Service Regulations (1914), Part I., Section 102, para. 3.

of separated forces so timed as to strike the enemy's front and flank . . . . simultaneously, few, if any, reserves being retained in hand by the Commander-in-Chief." To carry this out he divided his force into three portions :—

The preparatory attack. Column " C."
The turning attack. Column " B " with the " Flying Column " co-operating.
The decisive attack. Column " A."

General Townshend anticipated that the Turks would expect him to repeat the plan he had carried out at the battle of Kut, when he had divided his force into only two portions, and that in consequence they would endeavour to meet his turning attack with their reserve from Qusaiba. When this happened and the Turkish reserve became fully engaged with his turning attack, General Townshend hoped to effect a successful surprise by the delivery of his decisive attack on " V.P."

General Hoghton's column (Column C) was to attack and hold to its ground that wing of the enemy, on the left bank of the river, which was furthest from his line of retreat. The column was to move on the 21st to a point about two miles north-east of Bustan, preparatory to its advance next morning at daylight.* This advance was to be directed against the part of the Turkish trenches extending for about five hundred yards on each side of the work known later as " Water Redoubt." General Hoghton was instructed to work his way forward and establish his line within long rifle-range of the enemy, if possible. His rôle was not only, he was told, " to pin the enemy down in his position, but by making a great display and pretence of force to induce the enemy to bring reserves to this menaced part of his position." He was further instructed not to make his attack a decisive one until he saw General Delamain's column moving forward ; and then, having got into the enemy's position, he was to sweep southward to assist the naval flotilla in its passage through the " cut."

The Naval flotilla† (i.e., *Firefly, Comet, Shaitan, Sumana,* four 4·7-inch guns in horseboats towed by *Shushan* and *Mahsoudi* and two 5-inch guns of the 86th Battery in barges) was to sweep with its fire the hostile position south-westward of " High Wall," engaging hostile guns and infantry located in that area, and to watch carefully for any hostile infantry advance along the right bank directed towards the boat-bridge at Lajj. As regards pursuit a free hand was left to the Senior Naval Officer.

* Sunrise was at 6.30 a.m.
† Captain Nunn arrived on the 22nd and directed the naval operations.

After the battle had been well commenced by General Hoghton's column, the turning attack (i.e., Column B under General Hamilton) was to advance with vigour and resolution against the enemy's left and rear and so menace his line of retreat; and the Flying Column under General Melliss was to co-operate with General Hamilton's column by moving wide on its outer flank against the enemy's rear about Qusaiba so as to enfilade his second line of trenches, thus seriously threatening his line of retreat. This attack also was to be pushed with vigour.

As soon as the enemy seriously felt the turning attack the decisive attack (Column A under General Delamain) would be ordered forward against the redoubts at "V.P." and its advance would be the signal for the whole force to press forward against the enemy. The divisional artillery, which up till then was to support General Hoghton's advance, was to make every effort to bring a converging fire on "V.P.," and even the guns with the turning attack were, if possible, to direct their fire on "V.P."

The three columns under Generals Melliss, Delamain, and Hamilton were to move off from Lajj during the night 21st/22nd in one body "under arrangements of General Delamain." They were to follow a track which, starting across the plain for three miles from Lajj in a north-north-westerly direction, followed a line of mounds marking the remains of an ancient canal and appeared to lead round the enemy's left flank. General Delamain's column was to take up its position of assembly at a point about 5,000 yards east of "V.P.," General Hamilton's column continuing to a position about three miles further on, and General Melliss's column moving, still along the track, to a position about two miles beyond that of General Hamilton.

General Hamilton with Column B was to commence his attack about 7.30 a.m., i.e., well after General Hoghton's column should have commenced the frontal attack. General Hamilton's objective was given him as "through Qusaiba village 'camp' on river bank."

As regards the operations of the Flying Column under General Melliss, General Townshend's order ran: "Although the Cavalry Column* and 18th Mixed Brigade† are independent commands, the two commanders will work in intimate co-operation and understanding and mutual support and unity of doctrine. The Flying Column should be able to render second

* i.e., "Flying Column." † i.e., Column "B."

line of enemy's trenches untenable by enfilade and reverse horse artillery fire ; and the effect should also be to cause the retreat of the garrison of the first line of entrenchments when they hear our guns in the rear." The Flying Column also received special instructions as regards pursuit.

The principal duty laid down for the Air Force during the battle was to give information as to the direction of retreat of the bulk of the enemy's forces, to watch for any reinforcements coming from Baghdad and for any enemy movement on the right bank of the Tigris.

General Townshend's headquarters would be near the divisional artillery in rear of General Hoghton's column. Every man was to carry one full day's ration (in addition to emergency rations) and as much water as possible ; and half the 103rd Mahrattas was detailed as escort to the transport and shipping at Lajj.

General Townshend's total combatant strength was 13,756 officers and men (including the half battalion at Lajj)* 30 guns (excluding those on the river) and 46 machine guns (also excluding those on the river). This gave him for the battle a rifle strength of 10,212, distributed as follows :—

	Rifles.	Sabres.	Guns.	Machine guns.	
Column A ..	3,650	—	10	12	(General Delamain).
Column B ..	2,693	—	6	8	(General Hamilton).
Column C ..	3,154	103	8	10	(General Hoghton).
Flying Column ..	715	977	6	16	(General Melliss).
	10,212	1,080	30	46	

The Mesopotamia Commission, drawing their conclusions from the evidence given before them, speak of a spirit of intense optimism which animated the headquarters and administrative staffs on the 21st, and that this appeared to be outwardly so is rather confirmed by other independent accounts. But General Townshend deprecates such an idea. In reply to a query on the subject by General Nixon on the eve of the battle General Townshend said that he would win the battle, which, he continues, he did. But he explains that he had no doubts as to the extreme gravity of the results of his offensive—undertaken with insufficient forces—and that all his study of war indicated disaster to him. He had made up his mind, however, to carry out the operations with confidence and cheeriness. In the impending battle he hoped to paralyse a great part of the enemy's forces by the attack of General Hoghton's column,

* See Appendix XI.

whilst his main attack under General Delamain dealt the decisive blow against the enemy's flank and rear. In this way he hoped either to throw the Turks into the Tigris or compel them to a disastrous flight across the Diyala river six miles behind them.

At about 2.30 p.m. on the 21st November, General Hoghton's column moved off on a widely extended front towards Bustan, accompanied by General Townshend and his divisional headquarters and also by General Nixon and his staff. General Nixon considered his presence necessary in view of possible developments. It is, however, noteworthy that he informed the Mesopotamia Commission that, although it was an occasion on which he might have taken executive command of the operations, he did not consider that his state of health would have permitted of his doing so.

General Hoghton's column moved to the river bank about two miles south-east of Bustan to halt and water; and as the sun set (about 5 p.m.) the Arch of Ctesiphon was seen by the force standing out clearly against the blood red sky. At about 9 p.m. the march was resumed in a northerly direction, and the position of assembly—about two miles north-east of Bustan—was reached before midnight. Here, in the bright moonlight, the column rested till 5 a.m.

The other three columns, leaving Lajj about 7.30 p.m. and guided by an officer of Royal Engineers and an officer of the divisional staff lent for the battle to General Delamain,* marched northwards along the track mentioned above on a general bearing of 340°.

General Delamain's column reached and halted at its position of assembly about midnight. General Hamilton's column halted at its position, farther along the track—roughly 5,000 yards north-eastward of "V.P."—about 1 a.m.; and the Flying Column under General Melliss, still following the track which now trended westward, halted at 3 a.m. No enemy opposition had been encountered, and all the columns reported their arrival by cable to General Townshend's headquarters.

On his arrival at his position of assembly General Delamain sent out infantry scouts (2/7th Gurkhas and 24th Punjabis) to ascertain the nature and exact position of a dry water channel, shown on their sketch maps as running roughly north and south about half-way between them and "V.P." These scouts returned about 2.30 a.m. without having discovered anything

* Lieutenant A. B. Matthews, R.E., and Captain W.E.T. Morland, Oxf. & Bucks. L.I.

in the nature of a water channel ;* but they had located " V.P." and confirmed the correctness of their position of assembly. As soon as it was light enough, the dry canal occupied by the troops was improved by entrenching to give protection against possible artillery fire ; and, this being completed about 4 a.m., the troops rested for two and a half hours.

The naval flotilla proceeded upstream from Lajj on the evening of the 21st, the two leading gunboats *Firefly* and *Shaitan* encountering an ambush of snipers on the river bank, whom they dispersed without difficulty ; and the gun barges took up a position south-east of Bustan from which at daylight to bombard a redoubt reported near that place, with the gunboats ahead of them. As the river banks were about fifteen feet high the gun barges could not be seen by the enemy, but the guns would have to use indirect fire.

These preliminary British movements had so far proceeded smoothly according to their programme. But the enemy already had cognisance of them. For, from the earliest hours of the 22nd November, a constant stream of messages reached Turkish headquarters informing them that the British were carrying out a series of movements at some distance away from the Turkish left flank. About 5 a.m. Turkish headquarters received a report that an enemy column, estimated as a cavalry and an infantry brigade, was making straight for the Diyala position. This report caused Nur-ud-Din much perturbation and he was only with difficulty prevailed upon to abstain from at once ordering the 51st Division back from Qusaiba to the Diyala line. As it was, he contented himself with ordering his cavalry brigade to check this hostile movement ; and it was with considerable relief that he received a report two hours later that this British column had of its own accord altered its direction and was moving towards Qusaiba.

Although all four British columns had been given a few hours rest after their night march, the bitter cold militated against proper repose and at dawn the force rose, cramped and cold, to await events. Mist shrouded the Tigris and adjacent portion of the enemy position and did not lessen when the sun rose about 6.30 a.m. General Hoghton's men could not see for any appreciable distance to their front, though it was otherwise to the northward, where an officer of the Norfolks † mentions in his diary that the whole landscape appeared to be alive with masses of the enemy's troops marching to and fro.

* It was never found and appears to have been an error in the sketch map.
† Captain A. J. Shakeshaft.

Between 6.0 and 6.30 a.m. General Hoghton's column—extended on a front of 1,500 yards—began to feel its way forward in the direction of the Ctesiphon Arch.* The front line consisted of the Oxfords (on the right) and the 119th, with the 22nd and 48th following in second line in support.† Further in rear came the 76th Field Battery; while the two 5-inch guns of the 86th Battery remained, for the time being, at the position of assembly with the 17th Sapper Company as escort; and near here General Townshend had his headquarters.

Just before 7 a.m. the din of battle commenced with the opening of fire by the guns with the naval flotilla. For about an hour these bombarded an area on the river bank opposite Bustan, where aeroplanes had reported the Turks as busy digging a redoubt. No sign of any such work could be seen, however, and it does not appear to have existed. The heavy guns in barges then proceeded to distribute their fire over various points in the hostile lines, but without apparently any great effect, due probably to their having to fire indirectly. The four gunboats cruised up and down the reach between the gun barges and Bustan and tried in vain all day to get round the bend of the river near Bustan; but the Turkish guns—especially their heavy guns—on the right bank made this impossible by their accurate fire. The gunboats experienced great difficulty in replying effectively to the Turkish fire, owing to the high river banks, which, however, did not hide their own masts and funnels, and these afforded good marks for the enemy. During the day the *Comet* was hit on her port quarter on the waterline, but necessary repairs were carried out without withdrawing her from the action.

To return to the early morning progress of General Hoghton's infantry. Advancing slowly and methodically they failed to draw from the enemy trenches any fire or sign of activity; and about 7.15 a.m. the 76th Field Battery and the two 5-inch guns of the 86th Battery in rear of them opened fire. But the enemy still made no response and the mist still obscured the front. At about 7.40 a.m. General Townshend's headquarters were able to get into heliographic communication with Generals Delamain's and Hamilton's columns; and the helio flashes, confirming the telephone reports, gave General Townshend a clear idea of their respective positions.

* Unless it was due to the mist it is not clear why the advance was directed to the left of the objective laid down in the operation orders.

† One company 48th Pioneers was left at the position of assembly to prepare an aeroplane landing-ground there, and then to guard the aeroplanes from Arabs. In the evening this company rejoined the battalion at "V.P."

At 7.45 a.m. General Townshend received a message from General Hamilton asking whether he should advance as he did not hear General Hoghton's guns. General Hoghton's infantry were still not engaged, and the enemy position to their front appeared so devoid of life and movement that it seemed doubtful if the trenches there were occupied at all. General Townshend decided that in any case he would delay his turning attack no longer and he sent General Hamilton permission to advance. He thus approved a deviation from his original plan, which, as will be seen subsequently, had an important bearing on after events. General Hamilton began his advance about 8.30 a.m., and General Melliss, co-operating on his right, also moved forward at the same time.

To understand clearly the operations of the next hour or two it is advisable to turn now to the Turkish dispositions.* The 112th Regiment of the 38th Division was holding the trenches against which General Hoghton's column was advancing, but did not engage the British infantry till they were about nine hundred yards distant. Two battalions of the 142nd Regiment of the 45th Division were holding the two redoubts at "V.P." and the next two redoubts to the south, with the third battalion of the same regiment in rear of "V.P." in local reserve. The other two regiments (3rd and 141st) of the 45th Division were posted as divisional reserve in front of the Turkish second line and about one and three quarter miles from "V.P." The Turkish account says that the British opened a destructive artillery fire on "V.P." before 6.45 a.m. ;† and that about an hour later the 45th Divisional Reserve learnt from its scouts of the approach to within two and a half miles of the British turning attack, estimated by them as nearly two infantry regiments, a cavalry brigade and two batteries. The 45th Division at once sent forward into the open a battalion from each of the 3rd and 141st Regiments for a distance of about one and a half miles to meet the British turning attack, supporting them with these two regiments' remaining battalions (less two companies 141st) in echelon on both flanks. Two companies of the 141st were at the same time despatched to reinforce the "hard-pressed" 142nd at "V.P." ; these companies, however, met some fugitives of this regiment and, failing to turn them back, retired with them for some little way and took up a defensive line.‡

* Taken from the Turkish account.
† According to our accounts it must have been about half an hour later.
‡ Apparently facing the British turning attack.

Both General Townshend and General Delamain, from their respective positions, saw masses of the enemy falling back, and soon afterwards General Townshend received a message from General Delamain: "The enemy are in full retreat. May I advance on 'V.P.'" General Townshend, thinking that this Turkish retreat had been caused by his turning attack, replied in the affirmative, and the infantry of General Delamain's column at once began to advance against "V.P." This was a little before 9 a.m.

It is difficult to give a satisfactory explanation of the masses of men seen retiring by Generals Townshend and Delamain and by others; it was too early in the day for the mirage, and several officers who observed the movement were in positions two and a half miles apart. The Turkish account admits that a certain proportion of their men retreated at this period, but gives no indication of anything like a retirement in mass. Possible solutions are either that the masses seen were moving to oppose the British turning attacks or else that they consisted largely of non-combatants.

About 7 a.m. the commander of the Turkish 51st Division received telephonic orders from Nur-ud-Din to leave at Qusaiba, as army reserve, two infantry battalions, his engineer company, and a quick-firing battery, and to move out with the remainder of his division to oppose the British column reported to be moving from the north on Qusaiba. While the necessary arrangements for this move were being made, the divisional machine guns were fortunate enough to bring down a British aeroplane passing overhead, thus again depriving General Townshend at a critical period of one of his very few remaining aircraft. The remainder of the 51st Division, comprising five battalions infantry,* four field and six mountain guns and machine gun company (four guns) and accompanied by the Iraq Cavalry Brigade, moved north-north-east to a low mound about one and a quarter miles distant. Leaving the field guns here in position, the division opened out and moved eastward, with the cavalry brigade covering their left.

In the meantime, on the British left, General Hoghton's infantry had closed by 8 a.m. to within about 2,000 yards range of the enemy's trenches. As the mist lifted, the 17th Brigade could only tell the approximate position of these trenches by the line of wire entanglements, which was all that was visible, for the enemy occupants still showed no signs of activity. General Hoghton, not wishing to commit himself to an attack

* 7th Regiment, three battalions. 9th Regiment, two battalions.

without further reconnaissance and mindful of his instructions not to make a decisive attack until he saw General Delamain's column move forward, gave his men the order to halt, and his leading troops entrenched themselves in a dry water channel while the 76th Field Battery came up in rear in closer support. About 9 a.m. General Townshend, having just approved of General Delamain's advance, sent General Hoghton orders to push home his attack.

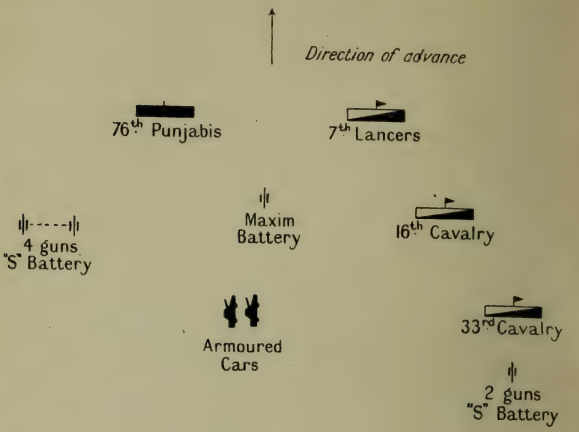
About half an hour before this the two columns of the turning attack had commenced their forward movement, both of them directing their advance on the angle where the hostile second line bent to the north-westward.

Leaving their medical units and reserve ammunition, guarded by a company of the 7th Rajputs and half the 22nd Sapper Company, at their position of assembly, General Hamilton's column moved forward across an open plain devoid of cover. The Norfolks (on the right) and the 110th Mahrattas led the advance, with three-quarters of the 7th Rajputs and the 120th Infantry following in support ; and on the left of the supporting line moved the 63rd Field Battery. For some twelve to fifteen hundred yards the advance continued unopposed ; but then, at about 9.15 a.m., it came under a heavy rifle fire from shallow rifle pits in low scrub about five hundred yards to the front. The enemy here, consisting of about two hundred infantry (probably the advanced portion of the 45th Divisional reserve) were soon driven out, most of them being killed.* General Hamilton's men could now see to their left the troops of General Delamain's column advancing against " V.P." ; and the Norfolks and 110th continued their advance but were soon brought to a standstill by a heavy rifle and machine gun fire from a line of enemy infantry (the main body of the 45th Divisional reserve) about nine hundred yards distant ; and at the same time the 63rd Field battery came under heavy hostile gunfire. The enemy, who were in a position covering their left flank between their two lines of defence, were in superior strength† and inflicted heavy casualties on their British assailants, especially on the 110th Mahrattas. Just before 10 a.m. two companies of the 120th Infantry were pushed forward from the supporting lines to reinforce the Norfolks' right, as this was suffering from an enfilade fire.

* An officer of the Norfolks speaks of them as fine men who fought well.

† The Turkish account queries the correctness of this, saying that the strength of the five and a half Turkish battalions here was less than 4,000 and implying that General Hamilton's column was much stronger. In point of fact, however, there were less than 2,500 rifles in General Hamilton's attacking brigade.

Meanwhile, away to the right of General Hamilton's column, General Melliss's advance was being carried out in a formation approximately as below:—



Before this advance had proceeded far, a body of enemy cavalry (the Iraq Cavalry Brigade) advanced towards the right flank and rear of the Indian cavalry and threatened to cut off the transport, field ambulance, and pack wireless set, but were held off without much difficulty by the fire of two guns of "S" Battery and part of the 33rd Cavalry.

After advancing about twelve hundred yards the 76th Punjabis came under heavy fire from enemy infantry in their front and a hot fight ensued. The 76th, behaving with great gallantry, gained some ground, but the hostile force opposing them—evidently part of the 51st Division—was too strong, and about 10 a.m. the further advance of the 76th was definitely checked and they dug themselves in. They had suffered heavy casualties, including the loss of their two senior British officers. The Cavalry Brigade on the right of the 76th had also come under heavy gun and rifle fire, and, having suffered considerable casualties in men and horses on the bare open plain, had been obliged to carry on their advance dismounted. They also were brought to a standstill about 10 a.m. under a continuously heavy gun and rifle fire, the guns of "S"

Battery being in action at from 1,000 to 1,200 yards' range. The officer commanding this battery saw about 10.30 a.m. a mass of Turks* to his left front retiring towards their second line, and subjected them to a rapid fire at from 1,800 to 3,100 yards' range, until they vanished out of sight.

It was a little before 9 a.m. that General Delamain received General Townshend's message authorising the advance of the attack against "V.P." The necessary preparations had already been made, so that no delay occurred. General Delamain's guns (six field guns, 82nd battery, and the four 1/5th Hants howitzers) had been bombarding "V.P." for some time with, according to the Turkish account, considerable effect, and Colonel Climo, commanding the 30th Brigade, which was to lead the advance, had assembled his battalion commanders and had impressed upon them the necessity of pushing through the attack without delay and of relying upon the artillery and machine gun covering fire as far as possible up to the moment of assault.

The distance to be covered by the attacking infantry was about 5,000 yards, and the 30th Brigade commenced its advance in artillery formation (lines of platoons in fours) on a frontage of 600 yards. The 2/7th Gurkhas on the left of the front line directed the movement, with their left advancing on the northern corner of "V.P.," while the half battalion 24th Punjabis moved on the right. The 66th Punjabis and 117th Mahrattas followed in support, and in rear of the 30th Brigade came the Dorsets and 104th Rifles as local reserve under General Delamain's personal command.

The advance was carried out continuously and rapidly. After proceeding for about three thousand yards the 30th Brigade came under hostile artillery fire, but this did not check their rate of progress, and at about a thousand yards from their objective their lines, coming under Turkish rifle and machine gun fire, extended in succession. The advance was then carried on in rushes of a hundred yards, the men halting only to take breath. In addition to the covering fire of the field guns and howitzers, their advance was supported by the brigaded machine guns posted wide on the right flank and by the fire of a half battalion which took up a position on the left flank. Assisted by this covering and supporting fire, which the Turkish account shows to have been very effective, and without firing themselves, the 30th Brigade continued

* Probably fugitives from "V.P." and vicinity, see below.

their rapid advance, in spite of many casualties, until the leading lines were brought to a standstill by the wire entanglements some forty yards in front of the hostile trenches. The Indian infantry, however, were not to be deterred, and making their way through this obstacle by degrees, though not without heavy loss, they captured "V.P." shortly after 10 a.m., and the Turks, who had suffered very heavy casualties, fled in disorder from the northern end of their line.

On entering "V.P.," a part of the left half of the British line, i.e., portions of the 2/7th Gurkhas, 117th Mahrattas and 66th Punjabis, coming under heavy fire from a redoubt on their left, swung round and pushed southwards against this redoubt, but could make little progress. The remainder were rallied and reformed in "V.P." by Colonel Climo. The fact that a portion of Colonel Climo's brigade had become detached and were attacking southward was not known by General Delamain until towards evening. By the time he himself arrived at "V.P." they were in the Turkish trenches and invisible. Throughout the rest of the day, therefore, General Delamain was under the impression that the force under Colonel Climo's personal command was much stronger than it actually was. This misapprehension might have been removed had Colonel Climo not been wounded early in the afternoon.

General Delamain, following Colonel Climo's brigade with the Dorsets, 104th and Sapper company, saw that "V.P." was captured and that large numbers of the Turkish troops were retiring in disorder; while, at the same time, he heard heavy firing from General Hamilton's force on his right. Wishing to keep the Turks on the run and to enter their second line on the heels of their flying infantry, General Delamain sent forward half of the Dorsets to reinforce Colonel Climo and at the same time ordered the 104th up on Colonel Climo's right to fill partly the gap betwen Columns A and B and thus assist both General Hamilton and Colonel Climo. General Delamain, who still retained under his own orders half the Dorsets and his half Sapper company, also ordered his guns up to a position behind "V.P."

The capture of "V.P." was a fine performance, well conceived and gallantly executed; the operation is one of which the attacking force may well be proud.

In the meantime, General Hoghton's column had begun again to advance about 9 a.m. and moved forward for about a thousand yards without encountering any hostile fire. They then reached a zone of ground about a thousand yards from the

hostile trenches, where all cover in the way of low scrub had been burnt and where they were met with heavy gun, machine gun and rifle fire. Extending and firing in reply, General Hoghton's infantry continued their advance, but the mirage now obscured the view in this part of the field and their supporting field battery had to cease fire, through inability to discern its objective. But by 10.30 a.m. the 17th Brigade, under heavy hostile gun and rifle fire, had got to within seven hundred yards of the enemy trenches. Although at this time the 119th Infantry began to feel the effects of enfilade fire from "High Wall," the column had not suffered many casualties, and its reserves had not been pushed up into the firing line. The Turkish account implies that General Hoghton's troops were checked at this stage by the Turkish fire and could not advance further, but this is not borne out by the British accounts. Moreover, about this time General Hoghton reported to General Townshend that General Delamain's column appeared to have pushed on too far without giving him (General Hoghton) time to clear his front, which he was then proceeding to do.

Meanwhile, the two 5-inch guns had moved at about 9.50 a.m. from their original position in rear of General Hoghton for about a mile in the direction of "V.P." to support the attack of General Delamain's column.

To summarise the general situation. About 10.30 a.m. the two columns of the British turning attack were completely checked by parts of the Turkish 45th and 51st Divisions and their cavalry brigade; General Hoghton's brigade was just entering the decisive zone of attack; and General Delamain's column had carried "V.P." On the Turkish side the 35th Division and Arab irregulars on the right bank had not been engaged or threatened, and the three battalions of the 105th Regiment, with a field battery, were on their way to reinforce the left bank force; their heavy guns on the right bank had effectively checked the advance of the British Naval flotilla on the river; the 38th Division on the left bank had just become seriously engaged; a large proportion of the 45th Division had become casualties or had retired to the second line and the remainder were engaged holding off the main British turning attack; the greater part of the 51st Division and the Iraq Cavalry Brigade were engaged with General Melliss's column; and Nur-ud-Din had still in hand as army reserve two battalions, the engineer company and four quick-firing field guns of the 51st Division.

General Townshend had no reserve in hand at all. He had deliberately put all his units into his attacking columns. But it is evident from what he himself says in his book that he had reason subsequently to regret this action. Generals Delamain and Hamilton had each about a battalion which had not yet been engaged, and General Hoghton had rather more. The only effective aircraft remaining at General Townshend's disposal were two aeroplanes—one of them a converted Short seaplane, and the other a Maurice Farman—and they had more than enough to do in watching the flanks to guard against a surprise movement.

Thinking that the Turkish retirement before General Delamain's attack might well presage a general disorderly enemy flight towards the Diyala, General Townshend decided about 10.45 a.m. to proceed to "V.P." Leaving his original headquarters, General Townshend and his staff galloped across the two miles of open plain, coming under a brisk Turkish artillery fire. On arrival at "V.P." he learned the local situation from General Delamain. Before the latter's arrival there Colonel Climo had advanced with the primary object of capturing eight Turkish field guns, abandoned by the Turks, which could be seen some little distance to the westward of "V.P." According to the Turkish account these guns were about a mile in rear of "V.P.," and about a mile and a quarter in front of the Turkish second line. Colonel Climo was under the impression that they were behind the Turkish second line, but he appears to have been deceived by the mirage.

General Townshend saw that the battle was by no means finished. The enemy were making a fight for their second position, and he considered it essential to concentrate General Hoghton's column on "V.P." in support of General Delamain. He thought that the Turkish right wing, if left to themselves, must retreat; so he ordered his senior staff officer "to send a message to Hoghton to bring up his left shoulder and move on 'V.P.'"*

The actual wording of the message sent, and the orders issued on receipt of it by General Hoghton are unknown.† The order meant moving to a flank in front of an entrenched enemy, and General Hoghton commenced by retiring for a short distance. Then, leaving a few detachments and machine gun

* "My Campaign in Mesopotamia," by General Townshend.

† Practically the whole of the records of the 6th Division were destroyed in Kut, General Hoghton himself died in Kut, and his staff officers were killed at Ctesiphon.

sections to keep up a rapid covering fire, the 17th Brigade moved off across the open plain at right angles to the direction in which they had been attacking, at a range of from 1,000 to 1,500 yards from the hostile trenches. The Turks saw their opportunity and opened the heaviest possible rifle, machine gun and shrapnel fire, inflicting very heavy casualties. All accounts speak highly of the steadiness with which the movement was carried out, and all testify to the discipline and gallantry displayed by all ranks of the 17th Brigade, which finally, greatly reduced in strength, reached the meagre cover of a ditch some two hundred yards eastward of the enemy's line in the neighbourhood of Water Redoubt.

To Generals Townshend and Delamain at " V.P." it was apparent that the position on their left was serious. The advance of General Hoghton's brigade—by now much scattered —was definitely checked ; strong lines of Turkish reinforcements could be seen advancing to reinforce their line south of " V.P." ; and Generals Townshend and Delamain were unaware that the portion of Colonel Climo's brigade which had moved southward from " V.P." was in the Turkish trenches between them and the redoubt north of Water Redoubt, which was still held tenaciously by the Turks. It seemed essential that this redoubt, Water Redoubt and any others still held by Turks should be captured and that General Hoghton would require assistance to do so. Accordingly General Delamain, having ordered a heavy artillery fire to be directed against the advancing Turkish reinforcements, despatched under command of Major Utterson, of the Dorsets, his last remaining troops, i.e., half the 22nd Sapper Company and the half-battalion Dorsets, to support General Hoghton and capture this redoubt.

After heavy fighting and severe loss this combined attack captured the redoubt, the garrison, consisting of a portion of the Turkish 142nd Regiment, being practically all killed or captured after a most gallant defence. The advancing Turkish reinforcements had been stopped by the British artillery fire and General Hoghton, with his own men and those from General Delamain's column, attacked and carried first Water Redoubt and then the redoubt south of it.

Meanwhile, Colonel Climo's force was progressing westward of " V.P." Led by portions of the Dorsets and 2/7th Gurkhas and supported by portions of the 66th Punjabis, 104th Rifles, 117th Mahrattas and 24th Punjabis, the attack met with stout enemy resistance. But by about 11.30 a.m. they had captured

the eight Turkish guns and a number of prisoners.* The advance continued to a point about eight hundred yards distant from the enemy's second line, but could progress no further. Colonel Climo had organised a reserve in rear of the captured guns consisting of a company 66th Punjabis and the half battalion 24th Punjabis. But the latter (consisting only of about 25 men under its one surviving British officer—and he was wounded) had to be sent back to "V.P.," at General Delamain's request, to co-operate with the attack of the 17th Brigade south of "V.P."†

The capture of "V.P." and Colonel Climo's advance had weakened the resistance to General Hamilton's attack, as—according to the Turkish account—many of the 3rd and 141st Regiments opposing him had joined the fugitives of the 142nd Regiment from the northern sector of the first line. In any case General Hamilton's force had been able to clear the Turks out of two advanced positions, suffering considerable casualties, however, in the process; but by noon could advance no further, having reached a position not far from the left of the 76th Punjabis, who still maintained the original position they had captured. The leading battalions of General Hamilton's force had by this time all been absorbed into the firing line, and the three companies of the 7th Rajputs were moved up behind the 110th in general support.

About 11.30 a.m. the British cavalry brigade attempted to get round the enemy's left flank but were counter-attacked by infantry of the 51st Turkish Division and the Iraq Cavalry Brigade, and, outflanked themselves, were forced back for a short distance. Here for a time, owing to the excellent work of "S" Battery, the Indian cavalry held their own against superior numbers. But just before 1.30 p.m. a further retirement became necessary and they fell back to some rising ground near their original position of assembly. According to the Turkish account, the five infantry battalions of the 51st Division here had now all been absorbed into the firing line, which covered a front of about four miles. That they could make no further progress seems to have been due mainly to the stout fighting qualities of the 76th Punjabis and the fine work of "S" Battery, whose fire had put three of the Turkish mountain guns out of action.

Just after midday, news reached Turkish headquarters that their 45th Division had been practically destroyed. According

* During the day General Townshend's force took 1,200 Turkish prisoners.

† As mentioned above, General Delamain was under the impression that Colonel Climo's column was much stronger than it was.

to the Turkish account there was great delay in the transmission of information and orders, owing to the distances involved, the mirage, the constant interruption of telephonic communication and the lack of aircraft. Orders, however, were at once sent to Jevad Bey, commanding the army reserve, to push forward towards " V.P." and support the 45th Division. This reserve was still at Qusaiba and consisted of the 1/44th and 3/9th Battalions of the 51st Division with an engineer company and a quick-firing field battery; and one of the battalions of the 105th Regiment and a field battery just arrived from the right bank were sent to join it.

Leaving the engineer company in rear of the second line position to check fugitives, Jevad Bey at once pushed forward, probably just before 1 p.m., carrying with him a certain number of the fugitives of the 45th Division.* The two field batteries took up a position in the Turkish second line and opened fire on " V.P." and the British troops advancing therefrom. At the same time the heavy batteries on the right bank of the Tigris and in front of the Ctesiphon Arch also opened fire on the " V.P." area. It was this counter-attack that checked Colonel Climo's advance eight hundred yards from the Turkish second line, and General Townshend in his book attributes many of the heavy British casualties to this fierce Turkish artillery bombardment.

In the meantime the greater part of the 38th Turkish Division, whose *moral*, according to the Turkish account, was very low, had retired in disorder to Ctesiphon village when the British captured Water Redoubt, abandoning two field batteries in their flight.† The larger portion of the 113th Regiment holding the southern section of the first line appears, however, to have stood fast till about 1.30 p.m., when the 38th Divisional Commander ordered its retirement; and it moved in the direction of the boat-bridge, accompanied by the heavy battery in this area. Another field battery and two more infantry battalions of the 35th Division had also begun soon after midday to cross the river, but they were delayed and did not reach the left bank till the evening.‡

* General Townshend in his book gives the time of this counter-attack and bombardment as beginning about 12.15 p.m., but all other accounts, including the Turkish, make it at least half an hour later.

† In the course of the afternoon, finding that the British had not taken the guns, the 38th Division sent forward a detachment and recovered them without opposition, as there were no British troops in the vicinity.

‡ During the morning the Turks sent some ships down the river, apparently to move troops, but they were driven back by the fire of the British naval flotilla.

Thus by 1.30 p.m. the Turks had evacuated the whole of their first line, in most cases in disorderly flight before the British assaults; and the whole of their troops on the left bank, except for two battalions of the 35th Division arrived from the right bank, had been or were engaged in the battle. On the British side the 76th Punjabis were still holding on to the position they had gained, the Cavalry Brigade had been obliged by superior numbers to fall back almost to their starting point, General Hamilton was unable to progress and Colonel Climo's advance—although it had captured eight guns—had come to a standstill. In the south General Hoghton was busy reforming his brigade, which was much scattered and disorganised, and the naval flotilla were still unable to pass the bend of the river at Bustan.

General Nixon, with his staff, had arrived at "V.P." about noon and learnt from General Townshend that all was going well. But the start of Jevad Bey's counter-attack, which he believed was being carried out by freshly arrived reinforcements, altered the British commander's views. General Townshend describes in his book how a succession of reports now began to come in showing a change for the worse in the situation and indications of the arrival of enemy reinforcements. "The wounded," he says, "were coming back to the rear in large numbers, and . . . . in many cases they were accompanied by unwounded combatants* . . . . Colonel Climo was carried past me severely wounded in three places but quite cheery. This gallant soldier would have been a great loss to me at any time, but at such a critical moment it was a disaster." As, according to his own statement, Colonel Climo was not wounded for the third time till after 2.15 p.m., this must have been about 2.30 p.m.

It was probably just before 2 p.m. that Colonel Climo's attacking force, whose firing line consisted of portions of many different units all mixed up, began to give way slowly before Jevad Bey's counter-attack. All the units had suffered heavy casualties; the Indian battalions had lost most of their British officers; and they were gradually driven back towards "V.P.," having to abandon the captured Turkish guns.

General Delamain now received a verbal message from General Townshend desiring the former personally to take what troops he could collect and try and capture the Turkish second line. Thereupon General Delamain sent General Hoghton a

* These and other stragglers were rallied at different times during the afternoon by officers of the headquarters and divisional staffs.

message asking him to send back any men of Column A who were with him, and requesting him to advance and support General Delamain in the coming attack. General Delamain then collected his signallers, orderlies, etc., and a few odd parties, amounting to some sixty men in all, and placing his Brigade-Major (Major Holdich) and Staff Captain (Captain Stewart) in command of squads of these, started his advance. At the same time he ordered his guns to follow his advance and take up a position some eight hundred yards in front of "V.P." to support his attack.

Picking up a few small groups of men on their way, whose numbers, however, were surprisingly small and hardly made good the heavy casualties the party had already incurred, General Delamain finally came into line with the left of General Hamilton's firing line, i.e., the 7th Rajputs. Colonel Parr, commanding the 7th, agreed to combine with General Delamain in an attack on Turkish trenches some three hundred to four hundred yards to the front, and his men, who had suffered heavily, responded gallantly to the call to them. But after making some progress, a strong Turkish attack in several lines could be seen moving forward on General Delamain's left front making for his guns and "V.P." Further advance was impossible, and General Delamain ordered Colonel Parr to retire with his battalion and the remnants of General Delamain's party and reoccupy his former position. General Delamain himself, with his orderly officer (his Brigade-Major had been wounded and his Staff Captain killed during the advance), moved over to his guns, which managed by their fire to stop the Turkish attack when it reached within about one thousand yards of their position.

General Hoghton, who had been reorganising the scattered remnants of his brigade, had just begun with them a movement directed to sweep down the Turkish works to the southward to round up the remaining enemy garrisons, when he received General Delamain's request for support. He was only able to collect about 250 men made up of detachments of six different battalions, of whom about sixty were British; and with this small body he at once moved out to the support of General Delamain. The British infantry led the advance with great gallantry and this small body got within about three hundred yards of the enemy, who had taken up a strong position on some sand hills about twelve hundred yards from "V.P." Here General Hoghton held on till it was dark, when enemy reinforcements forced him to withdraw.

His Brigade-Major, two out of the four British officers with the party and some sixty men, mostly British, had been killed or wounded.

On the British right the 76th Punjabis still held on to the position they had gained, keeping at bay part of the Turkish 51st Division. A great part of this division and the Iraq Cavalry Brigade were held off by General Melliss's cavalry, who defeated several attacks directed against their right flank and rear, assisted by a company of 120th Infantry sent to their support, at General Melliss's request, by General Hamilton. About 4 p.m. the Turkish 51st Division made a fresh and determined attack upon the 76th Punjabis, who, however, with the assistance of some cavalry sent forward by General Melliss, prevented them getting nearer than five hundred yards. At dusk the Cavalry Brigade withdrew to "V.P." with its armoured cars.* These had been in action continuously throughout the day and had done very good work; and one of the motor lorries had been busy all day running backwards and forwards with wounded.

During the afternoon General Hamilton's column, with the whole of its infantry except two companies† of the 120th absorbed into their firing line, had been unable to make any substantial progress and had entrenched themselves as far as the hard ground would permit. About 5 p.m. General Hamilton made a final attempt to push forward. Leaving only half a company 120th as escort to the 63rd Field Battery and sending into the firing line his half (22nd) company of Sappers, General Hamilton proceeded to lead the advance in person. But before this attempt had fully developed, orders were received from General Townshend to break off the battle and withdraw for the night to "V.P."

Shortly after 5 p.m. General Townshend had come to the conclusion that he could make no further advance that day; and he decided to concentrate his force, bivouac on the position he had won, reorganise his units and attack again next morning. He thought it very probable that the Turks, who must have suffered very heavy losses, would retire during the night to behind the Diyala.

Orders were sent out to all units to concentrate at "V.P."; and there General Townshend dictated orders for the consolidation of the Turkish first line position with a view to

* Sunset was at 5 p.m.

† It was one of these companies that was sent to support General Melliss's cavalry.

continuing the offensive next day. General Hoghton's column was to hold " V.P." and the trenches for one mile south of it; General Delamain's troops were to continue the line to the south; and General Hamilton's men were to occupy the trenches towards the river.

The concentration at " V.P." was unmolested by the Turks, who had ceased firing and withdrawn to their second line as soon as it got dark. General Hamilton's column and the 76th Punjabis, who were farthest away, all reached " V.P." by 11.30 p.m., having in the meantime collected and sent in all their wounded.

As the concentration proceeded, General Townshend realised that his troops were in no condition to resume the offensive on the morrow. General Hoghton could only muster 700 men, General Delamain had about 1,000, and there were only about 800 or 900 left in General Hamilton's brigade.* General Townshend accordingly modified his previous orders. As soon as the columns had been reorganised he proposed to take up a restricted front nearer to the river, where he could more easily obtain water, replenish ammunition and food and evacuate his wounded. The position he proposed to take up extended roughly along the Turkish trenches from the river southward of High Wall to the Water Redoubt.

During the night 22nd/23rd General Delamain, with a mixed detachment of infantry and the 82nd Field and 1/5th Hants Howitzer Batteries held the Water Redoubt. His original orders had been to advance and take up a position from the Ctesiphon Arch to the Tigris, but this was found to be impossible owing to the Turks being in position eastward of Ctesiphon village. The remainder of the force, including General Nixon and his headquarters, spent the night in the vicinity of " V.P."

The conditions obtaining in this part of the position—a mass of trenches and wire—are mentioned in many private accounts as being indescribable. When captured about 10 a.m. by General Delamain's column, its trenches were already full of Turkish dead and wounded, and to these during the day the British had added their quota. Many British wounded were sent to its vicinity during the day and for a great part of the night others, collected from all parts of the battlefield, arrived in a constant stream.† The usual ambulance transport

* These are the numbers given by General Townshend.

† During the Turkish counter-attack in the afternoon many of the wounded had to be moved to the rear to get them away from the Turkish shelling, but most of them were brought back to " V.P." after dark.

of riding mules and *dhoolis* had broken down and most of the wounded unable to walk were brought in on the springless transport carts, whose jolting often caused intense suffering. There was little or no water or food for them; and the cold was intense. The four field ambulances present had personnel and equipment to deal with a little over 400 wounded and they had to cope during the day and night with over 3,500 cases. The British medical service have every reason to be proud of the work of their representatives here, whose gallantry and devotion to duty all present speak of in the highest possible terms. Regardless of personal danger from enemy fire or from murderous Arabs, the medical officers worked during and after the battle "till they were fit to drop with fatigue, in alleviating the suffering of friend and foe alike."*

There is no available separate detailed record of the 4,511 British casualties on the 22nd November, but those on the 23rd and 24th only amounted to another 82,† and from the detailed return of the three days' casualties it is possible to gain a fairly accurate idea of how these were distributed.‡ Of the 317 British officers, 130 had been killed or wounded and one was missing; the 16th, 17th§ and 30th¶ Brigades had each lost both their staff officers; the Oxfords had only six officers and the Norfolks and Dorsets only nine each, left; and some of the Indian battalions were still worse off. The 110th had only one British officer remaining, the 104th had but two, while the 66th, 117th and 2/7th were left with only four each. The 255 Indian officers had been reduced in number by 111; and among the twelve thousand odd combatant rank and file over 4,200 had become casualties, the great majority being in the infantry battalions, of whom the 24th, 104th and 110th were the heaviest losers, as their casualties had in each case amounted to about 60 per cent. of their strength.

Owing to these heavy losses amongst officers, reorganisation in the dark was a very difficult matter. All units were much disorganised and dispersed, and the general confusion in the crowded trenches of "V.P." was such that it took some time to restore proper order. General Townshend's men, ably

* Sandes, "In Kut and Captivity."

† It is difficult to reconcile this figure with the fighting that occurred, but it is taken from the only available official record.

‡ See Appendix XII.

§ Company Serjeant-Major Arlett, 1/Oxf. & Bucks. L.I., acted for a time as Brigade-Major to General Hoghton, performing excellent work, and also distinguished himself by taking command of a large body of Indian infantry which had lost all its officers and leading them with the greatest courage and dash. Subsequently, also, when a prisoner after Kut had fallen, he did fine work.

¶ These two staff officers accompanied General Melliss.

supported by their artillery, had shown that, though many of them were tired and worn out by their past hard campaigning, they were capable of as fine work as ever if occasion demanded.

According to the Turkish account the general situation and the condition of their force at nightfall—exhausted and reduced by casualties heavier than those of the British—occasioned Turkish headquarters grave anxiety. The whole of their first line of defence, laboriously constructed during the previous months, had been lost ; and the only fresh troops available were the remaining two battalions of the 51st Division which were then being hurried forward from the Diyala river.

At dusk when General Townshend broke off the battle, the Turks were glad to do so also and the greater part of their force withdrew to their second line of defence. On their left was the 51st Division, which though still full of fight had experienced considerable losses ; here it was rejoined by the detachment under Jevad Bey and during the night by the remaining two battalions from the Diyala. On their right were the remnants of the 45th Division, which had borne the main stress of the fighting and which the Turks describe as reduced to a mere skeleton. Further south, stationed about Ctesiphon village, were two battalions and a machine gun company of the 35th Division and a battalion of the 38th Division ; behind them in the second line of defence were the remainder of the 38th Division and two and a quarter battalions of the 35th Division. The 35th Division had hardly been engaged during the day and was consequently almost intact, but it was weak both in effectives and in *moral ;* and two and three quarters of its battalions were still on the right bank of the Tigris with the heavy battery. The 38th Division had lost, though not very heavily, but its *moral*—always poor—was now at a very low ebb.

Some time after 9 p.m., after receipt and consideration of the reports of his subordinate commanders, Nur-ud-Din issued orders to the effect that if it were impossible to reoccupy the first line of defence without fighting, the whole Turkish force was to withdraw to the second line, and this operation appears to have been completed by daylight on the 23rd November.* Further, during the night, Nur-ud-Din reorganised his force into two corps, the 35th and 38th Divisions forming the XIIIth, and the 45th and 51st Divisions forming the XVIIIth Army Corps.

* Except for two and three-quarter battalions, 35th Division, and three heavy guns on the right bank of the Tigris. Of these one and three-quarter battalions and one heavy gun were withdrawn during the 23rd to the left bank, but it is not clear at what hour this was done.

CHAPTER XVI.

BATTLE OF CTESIPHON (CONTINUED) AND THE BRITISH RETIREMENT TO KUT.

WHEN daylight broke on the 23rd November General Townshend was able to appreciate better the condition of his force. Men and animals were thoroughly exhausted and suffering greatly from lack of water, and the different units were still much disorganised owing to the way they were intermingled as the result of the previous day's fighting. Every available transport cart would be required to evacuate the very large number of wounded; and the reserve ammunition and supplies were still at Lajj—some twelve miles distant—while the nearest water was at Bustan. Moreover, to add further to General Townshend's difficulties, a tearing wind had arisen at dawn—and continued throughout the day—carrying clouds of dust which greatly obscured the view in every direction.

The whole situation appeared to General Townshend to emphasise the hopelessness of any immediate resumption of the offensive. He accordingly decided that before he could contemplate such action he must water, rest and reorganise his force; and for these purposes he issued orders for a concentration of his troops along the Turkish first line of defence from Water Redoubt to High Wall and for the naval flotilla and shipping to come up to Bustan.

At about 7.30 a.m., acting on direct orders from General Nixon, a squadron of the 7th Lancers—only thirty strong—moved out from the vicinity of "V.P." to reconnoitre to the north and west and to ascertain if the enemy were still holding their second line of defence. This squadron soon came under heavy fire and had to fall back to "V.P.," having suffered nine casualties. Meanwhile, as the result of reconnaissance, his air force had reported to General Townshend that the Turkish forces had retreated to the Diyala river, that only a small rear guard detachment of one or two battalions was in their second line of defence collecting wounded and that the enemy's boat-bridge had been seen being towed upstream. "I knew now," says General Townshend in his book, "that they (the enemy) had received large reinforcements and were preparing to give battle again on the defensive behind the Diyala." According

to the Turkish account this was not so. They had not retired to the Diyala and the only reinforcements they had received were the last two battalions of their 51st Division.

General Melliss's Flying Column now ceased to be a separate organisation and the Cavalry Brigade were directed to reconnoitre in the direction of Ctesiphon Arch and ascertain facilities for watering; General Hoghton with Column C was to remain at "V.P." till the wounded had all been evacuated from the vicinity; the 18th Brigade (General Hamilton) and the 76th Punjabis were to reorganise at "V.P." and then move to High Wall; the 16th Brigade (General Delamain) were to reorganise at Water Redoubt; and the 2/7th Gurkhas and 24th Punjabis were to move out and take up a position near the Ctesiphon Arch.*

Moving off from "V.P." about 8.45 a.m., the Cavalry Brigade proceeded to High Wall and then advanced westwards to the Arch, which it reached, without encountering opposition, about 10.15 a.m. Here, taking up a covering position to the northward, the cavalry began to water their horses at the river. Soon after 10.15 a.m. a detachment composed of the 2/7th Gurkhas and 24th Punjabis—the two units totalling only about 400 rifles—the Maxim Battery and a section of the 82nd Field Battery took up a position on a low mound a few hundred yards south of the Arch. This mound became known subsequently as "Gurkha Mound."

Shortly after this the Turks opened fire, from their second line position some 2,000 yards distant, on the cavalry, and were answered by the guns on Gurkha Mound. But the Turkish guns continued to keep up a desultory fire and obliged the cavalry to send back their horses to the Arch and then to discontinue watering them.† The dismounted cavalrymen held the covering position till about 1.30 p.m., when they joined their horses at the Arch and from there retired, about 5 p.m., to High Wall.

At Water Redoubt and its vicinity the morning was mainly occupied in resorting and reorganising the heterogeneous collection of men who had held that locality during the night of the 22nd/23rd and in taking up a better defensive line. General Delamain had here the remains of the 16th Brigade (Dorsets, 66th, 104th and 117th) the 63rd and 82nd (two sections) Field Batteries and the 1/5th Hants howitzers.

* They were still under General Delamain's orders and received their instructions from him for this movement.

† Most of the horses were consequently not watered till nightfall.

At "V.P." the task of reorganising the different units took some time and it was not till well after 2 p.m., that the 18th Brigade and 76th Punjabis marched off for High Wall.

In the meantime, owing to the continuance of the accurate Turkish fire from their heavy guns on the right bank, it had become evident that General Townshend could not hope to get his shipping up to Bustan and must still depend on Lajj.

Turkish headquarters learnt during the morning that the British had entirely evacuated the area to the north and north-west of "V.P."; and, coming to the conclusion that the British must have suffered heavy casualties and were probably shaken and disorganised by the fighting on the previous day, Nur-ud-Din decided to launch a counter-attack. He appears to have been led to this decision by the enforced British inactivity; and at 1.30 p.m. he issued orders for an attack to start at 2.30 with the object of retaking the Turkish first line of defence.

The XIII Army Corps (35th and 38th Divisions) were to attack the two central sectors of this line, while the XVIII Army Corps (45th and 51st Divisions) with the Iraq Cavalry Brigade on their left were to attack and envelop the northern sector. The heavy battery on the right bank of the Tigris was to attract to itself the fire of the British gunboats and artillery.

Nur-ud-Din's order for the attack took some time, however, in reaching the different Turkish formations, with the result that the Turkish advance from their second line began considerably later than was intended.

It was at about 3 p.m., that the XIII Army Corps moved forward. On the right was the 35th Division—five battalions supported by two batteries of artillery—and on the left the nine battalions of the 38th Division. The general direction was given by the centre of the 38th Division marching upon Ctesiphon village. Both divisions, at once encountering British artillery fire from the direction of Gurkha Mound, were thrown into confusion and retreated to their starting point. The Turkish advance was thus summarily checked by the fire of "S" Battery, Royal Horse Artillery, and two guns of the 82nd Field Battery, and it was not till nearly 5 p.m. that the Turkish officers managed to induce the XIII Corps to recommence its advance.

The forward movement of the XVIII Corps did not begin until about 4 p.m. On the extreme right Jevad Bey's detachment of the 51st Division, attached to the 45th Division to

stiffen it, advanced against Water Redoubt and the redoubt immediately north of it; the 45th Division directed its attack against "V.P."; and the 51st Division (less Jevad Bey's detachment) were to move round to the north and envelop the British flank at "V.P." The Iraq Cavalry Brigade marched to the left rear of the 51st Division.

The commencement of the Turkish attack was perceived by the British main force at about 4 p.m. At this time the 17th Brigade (General Hoghton), the 76th Field Battery, and two heavy guns of the 86th Battery were still at "V.P.," whence the evacuation to High Wall of the wounded was proceeding but slowly in spite of strenuous exertions. Every available cart had arrived from Lajj by noon, but the number of casualties was very great and by sunset only about half the wounded had been removed. To add to the difficulty, the "V.P." area was subjected from noon onwards to intermittent enemy gunfire and shells kept falling among the wounded and the transport. Generals Townshend and Delamain were at Water Redoubt and the 16th Brigade with the 63rd and 82nd* Field Batteries and the 1/5th Hants Howitzers held that and the redoubt immediately to the north of it. The 18th Infantry Brigade and 76th Punjabis (Generals Melliss and Hamilton) were on their way from "V.P." to High Wall; and the Cavalry Brigade and the mixed detachment already mentioned were in the neighbourhood of Ctesiphon Arch and Gurkha Mound.

In view of the Turkish attack, General Townshend diverted two battalions of the 18th Brigade to strengthen General Delamain, and ordered the 76th Punjabis back to "V.P." to strengthen General Hoghton. The remainder of the 18th Brigade and four guns of the 82nd Field Battery moved on to High Wall.

At about 5 p.m. the Cavalry Brigade and the section of the 82nd Field Battery at Gurkha Mound withdrew to High Wall. This withdrawal, which coincided with their renewed advance, considerably encouraged the Turkish XIII Corps. The 35th Division pressed forward and occupied Ctesiphon village and Arch, but were stopped there by the fire from Gurkha Mound. The 38th Division moved forward, slowly, to the left of the 35th Division.

Although by dusk the Turkish 45th Division had arrived within about six hundred yards of "V.P.," the Turkish attack took some time to develop, and it was not till about 7 p.m. that heavy rifle fire opened all along the Turkish

* Less one section on Gurkha Mound.

line. At "V.P." General Hoghton's strength did not exceed 1,200 effective rifles and he was considerably hampered by the fact that half the wounded were still there. His six field and two heavy guns inflicted considerable casualties on the advancing Turks before darkness set in, but his infantry had orders to withhold their fire until the enemy got within five hundred yards. The 45th Division continued to attack intermittently until about 2 a.m., but, with the exception of a few men who remained within some two hundred yards of the British trenches until daylight, they did not get in to close quarters and finally most of them withdrew in confusion. It is possible that they were waiting for the enveloping attack of the 51st Division to develop. This division, the finest in the Turkish force, had not only lost touch in the dark both with the 45th Division and the Iraq Cavalry Brigade but had also completely lost its way. It appears to have wandered about in the dark without making any attack until 2.30 a.m., when an order from the XVIII Corps Commander reached it instructing it to withdraw to the second line. Commencing this withdrawal about 3 a.m., it is said to have managed to find its way back only by 7.30 a.m.

General Hoghton experienced great anxiety through the night, however, especially in regard to his ammunition supply which was much depleted and particularly that of the 76th Field Battery. This question of ammunition supply appeared so critical that at 11 p.m., General Townshend despatched a column of wagons, escorted by a squadron 33rd Cavalry, to fetch more from Lajj as quickly as possible. This task was successfully accomplished by dint of great exertion, the ammunition arriving at the front about 3 a.m.

General Delamain, reinforced by the Norfolks and 120th Infantry of the 18th Brigade, was holding the four redoubts south of "V.P." and the intervening trenches. Jevad Bey's detachment of the 51st Turkish Division attacked the centre of this line, held by the greater part of the 16th Brigade, with vigour and determination. General Townshend, who with General Delamain was in Water Redoubt, describes in his book how from 9 p.m. onwards the Turks made at least six furious attacks, all of which were repulsed; and how, at times, groups of the enemy got so close that they nearly succeeded in forcing their way into our trenches. Here also the expenditure of ammunition was a matter of the gravest concern and anxiety to General Delamain, to whose control of the defence General Townshend in his book pays a very high tribute.

Southward of Water Redoubt the Turkish attack never got near the British main line. British accounts show that the Norfolks, 120th Infantry, 110th Mahrattas and 7th Rajputs—who held this portion of the line—were never attacked with any vigour; and the Turkish account states that their 38th Division, which was directed to attack on the right of Jevad Bey's detachment, retreated precipitately as soon as fire was opened on it from the British main line.

From Water Redoubt southwards for the greater part of the night much Turkish cheering, shouting and firing was heard from the direction of Gurkha Mound; and it was evident that a fierce fight was in progress there. The 35th Turkish Division, making repeated attempts to overwhelm the British detachment holding this mound from 7 p.m., onwards, managed to work all round the mound, but without weakening the defence; and at 4 a.m., their attack withered away and they withdrew with severe losses. Muhammad Amin, the Turkish historian, and one of Nur-ud-Din's staff officers at this battle, pays the following tribute to the gallantry of the British defenders:—

> "The 35th Division strove for hours in front of that brave and determined little force left alone on the little hill-top and, though it lost many men, did not gain its end, nay did not succeed in drawing near even! . . . . Early in June 1916, I met Captain Stockley,* one of that brave band, after his capture at Kut al Amara, on the deck of the *Khalifa*. He and some hundred of his companions were being taken to Baghdad. That officer, as we passed by Ctesiphon, gave us many reminiscences of that night's fight between his detachment and the 35th Division. According to him, that detachment consisted of one hundred men of the 24th Punjabis and three hundred of the 7th Gurkhas and a machine gun company, under the command of the brave and daring Lieutenant-Colonel Powell†—in all four hundred men and a machine gun company. Having listened, with a forced politeness and a disdain I was far from feeling in reality, to the relation of the secrets of that night by Mr. Stockley, I must confess to a deep hidden feeling of appreciation of the deed of that brave self-sacrificing enemy detachment, which for hours, though only four

* Captain (now Major) C. H. Stockley, D.S.O., M.C., Indian Army, then commanding the Maxim Battery.

† Lieutenant-Colonel W. B. Powell, C.M.G., D.S.O., commanded the 2/7th Gurkhas.

hundred strong, opposed and finally drove back the thousands of riflemen of the 35th Division to the second line of defence. . . ."

The situation on the Turkish left is clearly shown by the following report (taken from the Turkish account) sent at 3.30 a.m. to Turkish headquarters by the commander of the XVIII Corps:—

"51st Division has lost its direction and is in an unsupported situation. 45th Division, which till sunset* continued its attack, has all retreated in the dark to the second line. I am in touch neither with the XIII Army Corps on the right nor 51st Division on the left. If reinforcements cannot be sent the divisional commander† considers it impossible to advance and reports the enemy's main body in Dariyye‡ group. At present all the 45th Division battalion and company commanders have been killed or wounded, and the much reduced companies are commanded by N.C.O.'s. Thus we may say that the 45th Division does not exist. Under these circumstances there is no hope of success for the attack. I have ordered 51st Division back to the second line. I suggest an attempt to defend this line."

Before receiving the above, however, Nur-ud-Din had already (about 2 a.m. on the 24th) issued orders for the attacking Turkish troops to be withdrawn to, and to defend, the second line, with the Iraq Cavalry Brigade covering the left flank. This cavalry brigade, which had passed the night 23rd/24th among the sandhills well to the left of the 51st Division and about two and a half miles northward of "V.P.," withdrew on receipt of the above orders, leaving a squadron on the sandhills.

The strain upon Nur-ud-Din had been very great, and the Turkish account contains a graphic description of the state of affairs at Turkish headquarters on the 24th November. They were

"in the depths of despair and despondency. On every brow could be read the meaning of the moral and physical signs of discouragement and fatigue. . . . . Neither the situation nor the defences of the second line were such as to hold out hopes of prolonged resistance. . . . . It was necessary to decide on one of the two following moves: (1) to break touch with the enemy and

* [*Sic.*] † Presumably of the 45th Division. ‡ i.e., "V.P."

retire to a safer position such as the Diyala line, or (2) to wait in the present situation in a state of readiness to move, so as to be able to decide according as the enemy's movements should require. The Commander-in-Chief chose the latter alternative. . . . "

There are no records showing the casualties among the British troops during this night attack ; but the total casualties according to the official returns during the 23rd and 24th were 82, and a certain number of these occurred during daylight and among the transport removing the wounded. But the strain on the infantry—already exhausted by their exertions and losses on the 22nd—was great. General Townshend's narrative shows also how great the strain had been on him personally. In this connection it has to be borne in mind that never before in the fighting in Mesopotamia had the Turks made counter-attacks with such vigour and determination—in fact they had never made a really serious attempt to retake a position once lost. It is, therefore, not surprising that General Townshend should have concluded that they had received strong reinforcements.

When dawn broke on the 24th quiet reigned along the British front. The wounded and Turkish prisoners at High Wall were evacuated to Lajj, where General Nixon also proceeded with his headquarters, leaving General Kemball behind temporarily to see General Townshend.* At Lajj General Nixon embarked in the *Malamir*.

Soon after daybreak General Delamain saw a formed body of Turkish troops moving up the river south-west of the Arch. These he shelled and he advanced for about a thousand yards to his front disposing of some stray Turkish troops and then withdrew unmolested to High Wall, to which position the detachment at Gurkha Mound was also withdrawn.

At 7 a.m. the Cavalry Brigade moved out to the north and took up a position north-east of " V.P." to cover the flank of General Hoghton's 17th Brigade, while the wounded were being evacuated. The cavalry remained out till after dark and kept at a distance a considerable number of Arab horsemen.

* As General Nixon rode towards Lajj with his staff, he came on large numbers of transport carts containing wounded which were in much confusion, owing to Turkish artillery fire. In accordance with orders from General Nixon, General Cowper remained behind to take charge of these carts. With three other officers, including a medical and a veterinary officer, and after considerable difficulty, General Cowper reached Lajj with the last cart at 1.30 p.m. Three lying down and three sitting up cases had to be carried in each of these small carts ; and this fact gives some idea of the inadequacy and difficulties of the arrangements and also of the sufferings of the wounded.

By 9 a.m. the whole of General Townshend's force, with the exception of the Cavalry Brigade and General Hoghton's troops, were collected in the vicinity of High Wall. General Townshend had moved his headquarters there some time earlier and had informed General Kemball, whom he met there on arrival, that he did not intend to retire a moment before it became necessary. This area (High Wall) was shelled intermittently from about 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. by the Turkish heavy guns on the right bank of the Tigris, but although their fire was accurate it caused surprisingly little loss.

Meanwhile the evacuation of the wounded from "V. P." was proceeding. It was not an easy task, but in spite of some sniping and intermittent shelling on the enemy's part and a dust storm, it was completed in the afternoon.

About 4 p.m. General Delamain moved out from High Wall with a mixed force to cover General Hoghton's withdrawal from "V. P." This commenced about 5 p.m. and was carried out without incident. By about 6 p.m. the whole of General Townshend's force, including the cavalry, was concentrated in the High Wall area. The morning move northward of the Cavalry Brigade, followed by General Delamain's afternoon advance and the withdrawal to High Wall after dark had, as will be seen later, a considerable effect upon the enemy's movements.

Throughout the 24th November General Townshend, who found himself in a very difficult position, anxiously considered his future plans. He was in constant telegraphic communication with General Nixon, who received from him the following report at 11.30 a.m. :—

> "The result of yesterday's afternoon and all night battle wherein Turks, who have been largely reinforced, assumed offensive, was that our wearied men hung on with utmost tenacity and repulsed Turks at all points. The Turks fell back into their second line entrenchments, where they are digging in still. I have concentrated my troops on river bank at High Wall. Hoghton still at 'V.P.,' which he is holding on to in order to evacuate wounded. He will concentrate on me this afternoon, after which I shall retire to Lajj reach to where my ships are and await events. Every sound military reason points to necessity of a retirement. If I went on and had to fight another battle, with my three brigades now reduced to 900 men, 700 men and 1,000 men respectively,* we

* These figures of General Townshend's are not easy to reconcile with those that should have been present after deducting casualties.

probably would meet with disaster. There are prisoners who were fighting the Russians up in the Caucasus in the two new divisions from the north. I have come to this conclusion with great regret and sadness, but it is asking the men to do the impossible. The effort of driving four divisions out of a fortified position has exhausted my division—the officers and men have done splendidly."

At 12 noon General Nixon replied approving the decision to retire to Lajj. But at 12.20 p.m. General Townshend telegraphed that he had decided not to retire and that he was going to order all ships up to Bustan under escort of the naval flotilla. At 1 p.m. General Nixon replied :—

"Naval ships could not get up to Bustan last night owing to long-range gun* on right bank position, which not only was putting shell close to them but also very close to wall at Bustan near which you are encamped. The arrival of the ships at Bustan seems problematical. Can you take on a force on the right bank as well as a considerably superior force on the left bank? Please think this out and wire your deliberate opinion before you finally decide about ordering ships up. *Blosse Lynch*, *Mosul* and *Kazimi* with barges are being prepared to evacuate wounded to Kut and will not be back for about eight days."

General Townshend then wired :—

". . . . Ships will start for Bustan to-morrow with bridge train under convoy of gunboats. This I have arranged with S.N.O. Thus I get rid of any retirement whatever—I remain on here on the field of battle I shall throw a bridge at Bustan and stop all enterprise on the right bank. Ships will be near Bustan with bridge and sufficient escort of the ship brigade† . . . . It will have a much better political effect not to retire, both here, India, and at home."

To this General Nixon agreed.

During the 24th three British aeroplanes reconnoitred in the forenoon and four in the afternoon. Altogether seven air reconnaissances were carried out, and as a result General Townshend reported to General Nixon that the Turks were

* By this time two of the three Turkish heavy guns had been withdrawn from the island.

† Thus in original received by General Nixon. There was evidently an error or omission in decoding.

retiring to the Diyala, and that this news was to be verified by reconnaissance next morning. According to the Turkish account, quoted below, the Turks had then not yet begun to retire.

During the afternoon of the 24th an Arab Shaikh brought in word to Turkish headquarters that the whole British force had reached Lajj in a defeated condition. The Arab was not believed and was placed in custody as a possible spy. But his information was confirmed by other reports which came in during the afternoon and evening, and the spirits of Turkish headquarters began to rise. But not for long. During the night 24th/25th a message came in from an officer of the Iraq Cavalry Brigade saying that the British, having left four battalions and two batteries in front of the Turkish position, were advancing with the remainder of their strength in an outflanking movement round to the northward.* The effect of this report was immediate. Nur-ud-Din at once (i.e., in the early hours of the 25th) issued orders for his whole force to retire to the Diyala. The Iraq Cavalry Brigade was to move on the northern flank of the retirement, keep the enemy in observation and try to stop him.

The retirement to the Diyala began at 4 a.m. on the 25th November, the 51st Division leading. The movement, begun in good order, fell into considerable confusion when the Diyala river was reached. But news soon began to arrive from the Turkish cavalry showing that the Turkish retreat was uncalled for.

The Turkish cavalry brigade, not having received the order to retreat and ignorant of the retirement of the remainder of their army, had remained in their forward position. At about 5 a.m. they despatched a report saying that the British had retreated from " V.P.," and that there was nobody in the old Turkish line of defence except Arab marauders. Further reports from his cavalry confirmed the impression that, if not retreating, the British at any rate showed no signs of advancing, and finally, at 2 p.m., Nur-ud-Din issued orders for the Turkish army rapidly to retrace its steps and reoccupy the second line position. This forward movement commenced an hour or two later.

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* This was evidently the advance of the Cavalry Brigade and General Delamain's force mentioned above. The Turkish cavalry officer who sent this report was sentenced to death for it, but the sentence was commuted to cashierment; and when Nur-ud-Din was relieved of his command this officer was pardoned and reinstated.

In the meantime General Nixon had made the following telegraphic reports to India and London :—

On the evening of the 22nd :—" General Townshend, after night march 21st/22nd November, attacked enemy's position at Ctesiphon on 22nd November. Severe fight lasted throughout the day, resulting in capture of the enemy's position. Owing to failing light it has not been possible to complete the fight. General Headquarters and Townshend's force bivouac night 22nd/23rd November in the captured position. Our casualties are heavy—no details yet received. Enemy's casualties believed heavy. We have captured 8 guns and some 600 prisoners as far as reported at present."

At midday on the 23rd :—" Dust storm blowing all morning 23rd delayed reorganisation of Townshend's force. Enemy's guns appear to have been drawn back generally, but his second line of trenches echeloned two miles in rear of left flank of position captured yesterday are still held by infantry. Some cavalry and infantry detachments pushed forward by enemy to reconnoitre have been driven in, but enemy's guns on right bank still bar passage of our ships to Ctesiphon. Left flank of Townshend's force will, on the night 23rd/24th, rest on river two and a half miles south of Ctesiphon in order to cover establishment of boat bridge and evacuation of wounded by steamer. Casualties not yet fully reported but expected to exceed 2,000. Two Martinsydes are missing, with pilots Major Reilly and Lieutenant Fulton. Enemy's dead are very numerous, and large quantities of arms and equipment have been captured. The eight guns mentioned in my telegram of 22nd were captured and recaptured three times, and had to be abandoned by our troops at nightfall, as they were not strong enough to maintain themselves in the forward position to which they had penetrated. The enemy has removed his boat bridge below Qusaiba and shows no offensive tendency at present."

Early afternoon 23rd (Sent to India only):—" . . . . the casualties in British officers have been very heavy. Several battalions, British and Indian, are reported to have only from one to three British officers effective. Separate lists will be sent to-night of names, but strong reinforcements of experienced officers will be required. Indian Army Reserve officers will not suffice. Casualties in horses also numerous, as enemy's shell-fire very heavy.

Have thought it necessary to inform troops that two divisions are coming as reinforcements, and I would again request that I may be informed when I may expect them. It is urgently necessary that they should be sent with the greatest celerity by units as ready without waiting to complete staff and details."

5.30 a.m., 24th:—"Heavy Turkish counter-attacks have been repulsed during night 23rd/24th. Reduction of our effectives and want of water necessitate retirement towards Lajj."

1.45 p.m., 24th:—". . . . the situation is as follows. Owing to the depleted state of the 6th Division, and with a still superior force of the enemy in prepared trenches in front of me I cannot call upon the troops, who have fought magnificently, for a further effort. I have just this moment received your* . . . . and was on the point of asking for immediate reinforcements. I want more guns, as enemy's guns are becoming more in number than mine."

To return again to the situation of General Townshend's force on the 25th November.

After a quiet night, the British commander sent out his cavalry brigade and an infantry battalion to cover the line of communication with Lajj. They held a position about four miles north-east of High Wall throughout the day and, although they observed about five Turkish cavalry squadrons in the distance, these made no attempt to approach. During the morning British aircraft reported that the Turks were entrenched in force about two miles east of the Diyala, towards which position three columns had been seen retiring from Qusaiba. The Turkish heavy gun on the right bank was silent during the morning, and Captain Nunn, the Senior Naval Officer, proceeded in the *Sumana* to Bustan, landed there and had a conference with General Townshend near High Wall. About midday, however, the Turkish gun reopened fire† and the naval flotilla, which had meanwhile moved up the reach, had to drop back again.

By this time General Townshend had decided that he would retire next day to Lajj, and he informed General Nixon accordingly in the two following reports despatched before midday:—

* This was a telegram from India informing General Nixon that the 28th Infantry Brigade should reach Basra from Egypt on 1st and 2nd December.

† The Turkish account is silent as to why this detachment on the right bank had not received orders to retire.

(1) "I have thought over matters in the night. Strategical and tactical reasons insist on Lajj as our advanced point on which I hope you will direct ships, stores and reinforcements . . . . Politically speaking, it is best to stay here at Ctesiphon. But it is always fatal in history if political reasons are allowed to interfere with military reasons. I shall therefore move to Lajj to-morrow, as I formerly arranged. More follows."

(2) " Air service reconnaissance this morning established the fact that Turks in force are entrenched on line two miles this side, i.e., east of Diyala. Three columns were marching west from Qusaiba towards this entrenched position above mentioned, and this is undoubtedly force which we repulsed in their attack on us night of 23rd/24th November. We have well over 3,000 casualties ; 2,300 wounded alone are in field ambulances. I expect total will be nearly 4,000. 17th Brigade have no first line transport left ; all mules and entrenching tools lost. Oxford and Bucks Light Infantry lost 450 killed and wounded ; only 140 men left for duty. 110th Mahrattas have 140 men out of 700 who went into action. 17th Brigade have 1,100 casualties out of 2,000 who went into action."*

Sir John Nixon and his staff had already left Lajj in the *Malamir* and arrived at Aziziya at 7 p.m. As an immediate advance beyond Ctesiphon was evidently impracticable until reinforcements had arrived and a thorough reorganisation had been carried out, General Nixon had decided that he had better move downstream to expedite the despatch of reinforcements. Consequently he did not receive General Townshend's above two messages till 7.40 p.m.

In the meantime General Townshend had issued the following *communiqué* to his troops :

" Sir John Nixon has expressed in his Army Order his sentiments in the very words I would have chosen myself. I cannot express my admiration and gratitude for the heroism displayed by all ranks. To show with what stern valour you fought, you drove four divisions out of a very strong position and forced them to retire beyond the

* These casualties do not all agree with the final official list, given in Appendix XII. The total casualties of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry amounted to 304 out of a strength of 638 and of the 110th Mahrattas to 440 out of a strength of 739. But some of the men were probably on duty at Lajj or behind the line.

Diyala river. But our numbers were too few to put them to rout; we have had 4,000 killed and wounded, the Turks losing many more than this figure. You have added a brilliant page to the glorious battle roll of the Army in India and you will be proud to tell them at home that you fought at the battle of Ctesiphon.

"The troops must know that I have ordered a move back to Lajj for the following reasons:

"(1) Food and supply question. The ships are exposed to fire on the river at Bustan, and the enemy can with cavalry accompanied by guns stop their progress up river to opposite their camp.

"(2) At Lajj I can await in security the arrival of reinforcements at Basra from France and Egypt due in a week's time.

"The ships at Lajj are in security. Three more monitors are promised to me in a few days."

During the afternoon (25th) British aeroplane reconnaissance reported two large Turkish columns, estimated at three divisions strong, and a cavalry brigade column advancing again from the Diyala One of the large columns was moving down the left bank of the Tigris and the other was moving inland,* while the cavalry column seemed to threaten Bustan.

By the evening it was further reported by the aeroplanes that the Turkish main force had halted, reoccupying their second line of defence, with their advanced guard pushed forward towards Ctesiphon. In his official report General Townshend says that he came to the conclusion that the Turks had been largely reinforced and that he would shortly be attacked by superior numbers. As his force was too weak to deliver another battle against such odds and force its way into Baghdad, General Townshend decided to fall back on his ships at Lajj under cover of darkness.

According to the Turkish account, however, the Turks had not been reinforced; and they attribute their return as solely due to the reports received by them that General Townshend had already retired.

At 9.40 p.m., after General Townshend had already started his retirement to Lajj, General Nixon telegraphed to him from Aziziya asking him not to make any move until he had received a cipher telegram which General Nixon was sending him. This cipher telegram ran as follows:

* This, according to the Turkish account, was the 51st Division, which had lost its direction during the advance.

". . . . I do not like your proposed retirement on Lajj for military reasons. At the present moment the enemy does not apparently realise your state and they themselves are apprehensive of being attacked by you; and your resolute attitude imposes on them. It is certain they will perceive their mistake as soon as you abandon this attitude and they will recover confidence and reoccupy Ctesiphon and probably move forward to attack you and turn all Arabs on to us everywhere. You should of course prepare a fortified position at Lajj, on which to retire in case of necessity and to cover your advanced base, but for military reasons given above I do not consider retirement desirable at present. No one can deplore more than I do the sacrifices suffered by your gallant troops but it is absolutely necessary to keep their spirits up. . . . . Wing West Kents and 14th Hussars are on their way to you and strong brigade arrives in a week at Basra; and our game is to play for time. There are men at Lajj belonging to your battalions and you can get them up. Picks and shovels can be replaced. Remember the *moral* is to the physical as five to one."

General Townshend replied to the above from Lajj at 10.20 a.m. on the 26th November as follows :—

"I received your (telegram) this morning on arrival with the force. I adhere very strongly to my (telegram) of 25th. I consider that with 4,300 casualties—which is the total—and when brigades are reduced to little more than a full strength British battalion, it would have been madness to have remained at Ctesiphon a moment longer than I did. At 4 p.m. yesterday two large columns of Turks estimated at 5,000 each by air service were advancing from their entrenched line covering the Diyala north of Qusaiba and at 5 p.m. were in sight, one moving along river bank and one at a turning distance inland whilst hostile cavalry brigade menaced Bustan. There is no question of my engaging such a force in my present state with the men worn out, so I waited till darkness and moved off in the dark to Lajj, where I am now entrenching and going to make myself comfortable. From a military point of view it would be madness and nothing else to remain at Ctesiphon. Remember you agreed before to my Lajj reasons. I endeavoured to impose upon them at Ctesiphon and flatter myself that I extricated my force under good conditions of manoeuvre, the hardest that can

be imagined. Had I been attacked in the middle of such an operation I should have been pinned down by one column and turned and cut off by the other. You must know what the result would have been. I know well. Here I remain and demonstrate up right bank almost immediately . . . Air service reports that the enemy have reoccupied the second line of entrenchments at Ctesiphon and are not advancing. I do not think they will venture to cross the open and attack me without their beloved entrenchments. I hope you will approve of what I have done to the best of my judgment. Nothing will alter my opinion that I have acted for the best. . . . "

General Nixon replied at 12.15 p.m., on the 26th :—

" I quite agree with action you have taken . . . . My object in asking you to consider possibility of remaining at Ctesiphon was made on your report that Turks had retired to the Diyala and now that he has advanced from his Diyala position the situation has changed . . . . "

Thus ended the battle of Ctesiphon, where the number of occasions on which the respective commanders took important decisions on incorrect intelligence was exceptional. Whether the result might have been otherwise, if either or both of the commanders had been in possession of more accurate information, is a question for the military student to discuss. As it was, the dearly bought tactical success of the British was to resolve itself into a strategical defeat with far-reaching results ; and the magnificent gallantry displayed by British and Indian officers and men did not achieve the success it deserved.

The Turkish losses between the 22nd and 24th November were very heavy. The Turkish account places them as over 9,500, but this number included many desertions ; and Muhammad Amin estimates the actual fighting losses at 6,188. To this number the 51st Division contributed twelve per cent. of their strength, the 38th Division twenty per cent., the 35th Division twenty-five per cent., and the 45th Division as much as sixty per cent. Of British prisoners the Turkish account does not lay claim to more than from five to ten.

The evacuation of the British wounded from Lajj proved a very difficult task. The casualties had been under-estimated and the very large unexpected surplus could not be accommodated in the *Mosul* and *Blosse Lynch*. The military situation, however, demanded immediate evacuation, and the local

medical officers had to crowd the greater number of the wounded into six other steamers and into barges, which had not been prepared for their reception and which, in some cases, were even hardly fit for ordinary passenger traffic. Medical personnel were insufficient, medical stores inadequate and all the arrangements for proper attention and supply fell far short of requirements. Despite the untiring efforts of the medical officers, therefore, many of the wounded endured great suffering and discomfort.* All accounts, however, testify to the resource and energy of the medical officers on the spot in their unceasing efforts to alleviate suffering. The report of the Commission appointed by the Government of India to enquire into the medical arrangements in Mesopotamia criticises these arrangements strongly but concludes its remarks in regard to the wounded from Ctesiphon in the following words: "We freely admit that the difficulties of the situation were such that the evacuation of the wounded at all was a very great achievement, for which the military and medical authorities in the field deserve very great credit."

General Townshend's force commenced its retirement about 7.30 p.m. on the 25th November, and, unmolested by the enemy, reached Lajj by 1 a.m., followed by the naval flotilla. During the 26th the 6th Cavalry Brigade covered the camp where a defensive position was prepared. Beyond a few Arabs, no enemy was seen, and officers and men—being once more in possession of their second line transport—experienced some degree of comfort.

Meanwhile, the Turks had not completed their reoccupation of their second line of defence at Ctesiphon till 1 a.m., on the 26th. Although the XIII Corps had reached the position before dark on the 25th, the XVIII Corps under command of Halil Bey, who arrived from Baghdad† on the 25th afternoon, had lost direction, having inclined too far to the north, and did not reach the position till 1 a.m., on the 26th. During the morning (26th) the whole Turkish force advanced and

* In a statement prepared for the Mesopotamia Commission General Nixon wrote:—"The alternative before us, then, after Ctesiphon and General Townshend's retirement was to bring the wounded down, notwithstanding the circumstances of shortage of medical personnel and river steamers, temporarily fitted for the purpose, at any cost of suffering to them, or of leaving them exposed to such treatment (i.e., being killed or mutilated by Arabs) before the regular Turkish troops had the chance to protect them. I took the former alternative, and cannot regret having done so, and although we knew that the journey down would be long and involve suffering, it seemed infinitely preferable that they should be got away and not be exposed to such a chance of ill-treatment and torture."

† The Turkish account says that this was his first appearance at the front.

reoccupied their first line; and Nur-ud-Din despatched his cavalry brigade, reinforced by two camel regiments,* the 51st Divisional Cavalry Squadron and a mountain battery, to push on in pursuit of the British.

Nur-ud-Din also took advantage of the effective assistance which the Arabs were now, owing to the British retreat, ready and anxious to afford; and he directed their movements so as to harass the British retirement. The tribal brigade which had been on the Diyala throughout the fighting were instructed to move down the left bank of the Tigris on Zor†; and the tribal brigade on the right bank of the Tigris were told to push along the right bank to Jumaisa. A further body of tribesmen under a Turkish commander at Musaiyib was directed upon Bughaila; and a detachment at Badra, about fifty miles north of Kut, consisting of a frontier company, some gendarmerie and tribesmen and two Hotchkiss guns, was ordered to march on Kut to threaten the British line of communication.

At 9.10 a.m., on the 27th November General Townshend telegraphed to General Nixon:—

> "I have supplies here for ten days British, seven days Indian. Ample ammunition. I do not propose to get up any more supplies here. I propose to move to Aziziya or south when supplies here are eaten in order to concentrate the forces for forward movement. Much too close to enemy here and in tactics one concentrates to the rear and not forward. He will never permit us to concentrate here unmolested. Can you give me any idea of how long it will take to concentrate one of the new divisions with this one and equip it with transport required in this country. I imagine not under two and a half months. Lajj was under water last December from rains, Aziziya goes under also I believe."

But, shortly after this telegram had been despatched, General Townshend received information from his cavalry and his air service, which indicated the approach of about 12,000 Turkish infantry in two columns and 400 cavalry. He decided to fall back the same afternoon, covering the twenty-two miles to Aziziya in one march. As he says in his book:

> "I began to see that there was no halting on the Baghdad side of Kut al Amara, if the enemy really intended an

* Mounted infantry units, each about 400 strong. The camels are described as untrained and very gun-shy.

† See Map 8.

offensive with large forces. If he once hooked on to my little force I should be pinned down and surrounded. Basra was a long way from Lajj and I knew that no reinforcements could reach me before late in December."

Orders for the march were issued at once. A considerable quantity of stores had to be abandoned for lack of transport and tents were to be left standing so as to deceive the enemy.

In the meantime General Nixon had sent General Townshend the following reply to the latter's proposal to retire to Aziziya or south of it :

"Army Commander entirely approves of your proposals and must leave such decisions to you on the spot and he knows you will not retire without reason. We hope to have the leading troops of 28th Brigade* up with you by 15th December and to follow them up with 34th and 35th Brigades.† The two new divisions‡ will be concentrated forward as soon as possible. Presume Leachman** is making enquiries re flood conditions at Aziziya."

At 3.30 p.m., the Cavalry Brigade moved out to cover the movement, and about 4 p.m., with the Turkish prisoners and the divisional transport leading, the march commenced. Hostile Arab horsemen followed for a short distance, being kept off by the cavalry ; but the lure of plunder at the deserted camp soon drew them off and the march continued without incident except for occasional sniping by Arabs. At 2 a.m. on the 28th a halt was made for three hours, and when the march was resumed at 5 a.m., the cavalry were relieved of the duty of covering the rear by a company of Norfolks, who carried out that duty till 6.30 a.m., when the cavalry again took their place in rear. The head of the transport reached Aziziya before 4 a.m., but the whole of the Cavalry Brigade did not get there till some six hours later.

According to the Turkish account, their cavalry and camelry made no impression on General Townshend's cavalry on the 27th, and the main Turkish force made no advance owing to lack of supplies ; while their steamers' passage downstream was impeded by their own obstruction in the river above Bustan. The first Turkish aeroplane to arrive on the Mesopotamian front appeared this morning (27th) and reported the British in occupation of Lajj.††

* Coming from Egypt. † Being sent from India. ‡ Coming from France.
** Political Officer with General Townshend.
†† No mention of the arrival of this aeroplane is made in any of the British accounts.

At Aziziya, General Townshend halted for two days, in order to evacuate the wounded and as much of the accumulated stores as possible. These left for Kut in the *Mejidieh* and barges on the 29th November.

The disadvantages to the British force of being dependent on the ships on the river for supplies was now to become very clear. During the retirement from Lajj to Aziziya considerable difficulties were encountered owing to the slow progress of the shipping accompanying the army. All the steam craft were rendered very unwieldy by the barges they had to tow on each side and were constantly going aground owing to the low state of the river, whose tortuous course gave the shipping at least double the distance to traverse which the troops had. The naval flotilla remained behind at Lajj to set fire to the abandoned stores, and then acted as rear guard to the other shipping. This involved having constantly to haul off barges, etc., which had run aground, and they were so delayed that, for the night 27th/28th, they had to anchor only four miles below Lajj, when all the tranport barges were clear. This process continued throughout the 28th, on which evening both the *Comet* and *Shaitan* went aground about eight miles above Aziziya, and remained fast all night, when they were subjected to considerable sniping from both banks.

At 12.45 p.m., on the 28th November, General Townshend telegraphed to General Nixon :—

> " Air service reports this morning are that large camps are being formed at Ctesiphon. One division infantry, one cavalry and one artillery brigade moving on Lajj from Bustan. Another column was north and east of Lajj. There were some 2,500 pack animals with these columns."

and at 4 p.m., he telegraphed further :—

> ". . . . It seems abundantly clear that the enemy has received large reinforcements and that before the battle of Ctesiphon. The troops reported in my telegram (given above) appear to me to be the advanced guard of Army Corps being concentrated at Ctesiphon. I expect he will advance to Zor, but if he moves from that place to attack me here I shall again refuse battle and fall back to Kut in all probability : for Kut is the proper strategic point which we are bound to hold and is a concentration zone for reinforcements arriving from overseas. My principal object then is to gain time for my concentration with the reinforcements and I must avoid battle for the present, using

Fabian tactics. Should he follow me to Kut then so much the better; we ought to destroy him in that case, but personally I do not think that he will fight below Zor so far away from his beloved entrenchments at Ctesiphon. The further we get him from Baghdad the more chance of our next battle knocking him out altogether . . . ."

At Aziziya on the 28th a welcome reinforcement joined General Townshend, consisting of the 14th Hussars and half the 2nd Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment. The former joined the cavalry brigade and the latter the 30th Infantry Brigade.

On this day the two Turkish army corps moved to Lajj; and then, hearing from their cavalry that Zor was clear of the British and from the tribal brigade at Jumaisa that General Townshend's force had retired to Aziziya, continued southward. By nightfall, though rather strung out, they encamped, covered by their cavalry, in the vicinity of Zor.

In the meantime General Nixon with his headquarters in the *Malamir*, after halting for the 26th at Aziziya, had continued his journey downstream. Reaching Kut at 1 p.m., on the 28th the *Malamir* started again at 4.30 p.m., but ran aground one and a half miles below Kut and remained fast for the night. Getting off next morning at daybreak, the *Malamir* in company with the *Butterfly*,* *P 5* and *Julnar* (the two latter carrying wounded only) continued down the Tigris. During the afternoon and night of the 29th November, General Nixon's progress is shown by the following telegrams he despatched to General Townshend and the officer commanding Kut:—

2.10 p.m. "We have been held up since 11 a.m . . . . Very high wind and *Butterfly* aground.† Hope to get on when wind dies down. Some 200 Arab cavalry seen on left bank and moving downstream . . . ."

6.45 p.m. "We are moving upstream few miles as we hear Turks behind us."

10.10 p.m. "*Malamir* with Army Commander, *Julnar*, *P 5* and *Butterfly* returning to Kut after having driven off some 300 hostile Arabs . . . . Reports indicate that left bank opposite Shaikh Saad occupied by Jassan force of Turks with two or four guns, though fire of latter was not drawn to-day. Owing to having two ships full of

* The second of the new river gunboats; she was launched 21st and left Basra for the front 24th November.

† One of the sudden violent wind storms, peculiar to Mesopotamia, had blown her into the bank.

wounded and very high wind which drove us into bank and kept us there all day we were prevented from attempting to force through. . . . ."

10.30 p.m. To General Townshend. " What troops can you spare to enable line of communications to be reopened and when can they reach Kut . . . ."

The Turkish force from Jassan was estimated by General Nixon as consisting of about 1,500 cavalry and infantry with two or four guns. At about 3 p.m., some ten miles north of Shaikh Saad a force of about 300 Turks and Arabs had attacked the ships with General Nixon, whose staff, organising all available rifles—some 120 in number—landed a force and drove them off. In view of the possibility that the Turks were forming an entrenched post on the left bank opposite Shaikh Saad it was considered the safer policy to return to Kut and organise a column to move down and deal with interruptions to the line of communication.

To return to General Townshend's force. The *Comet* which went aground on the evening of the 28th November got off the next morning, but the *Shaitan*, overstrained by heavy towing work and frequent grounding, had sprung a leak ; and before it could be stopped her low gunwales were under water and she rested on the bottom. She was lightened of guns, ammunition, etc., while the *Firefly*, *Comet* and *Shushan* endeavoured to drive away the Arabs, who kept up a constant fire at close range from cover on the river banks.

In response to a wireless request from the Senior Naval Officer, General Townshend issued orders at 1 p.m., for the Cavalry Brigade to move out and drive off the Arabs and he also sent out in support a section of field guns and the 7th Rajputs. The Arabs and some Turkish cavalry were quickly driven off by the British cavalry, over a hundred Arabs being killed by the 14th Hussars and 7th Lancers, and the Cavalry Brigade returned to camp about 4 p.m., having suffered no casualties.

At 3.50 p.m. on the 29th November, General Townshend telegraphed to General Nixon :—

" . . . . I see it is possible that we may not be able to march to advance on Baghdad till March at earliest. In all cases Kut, which I understand does not go under water, is indicated as most suitable place for concentration of troops. A suitable place for covering force to that concentration would be Shadi* opposite Bughaila and it

* Qala Shadi, *vide* Map 8.

is at Shadi that the 6th Division should be in entrenched camp within easy supporting distance also of Kut, i.e., two marches. I propose then to march back to Shadi. Regard it as most unlikely that enemy will follow south of Aziziya. I should certainly expect activity on the Euphrates now. It is indicated that the enemy is now at Zor though high wind to-day hitherto prevented reconnaissance—one is now starting. Wounded left for Kut on *Mejidieh* to-day; all ships safe except *Shaitan* which having opened seam had to be beached in a sinking condition.... Naval flotilla standing by her and trying to pump her out and get her here."

Twenty minutes later General Townshend telegraphed :—

"Three columns of enemy reported north of Kutuniya."

About 6 p.m. Captain Nunn, Senior Naval Officer, went down to Aziziya in the *Comet* and, while discussing the situation with General Townshend, received a wireless message from the *Firefly* reporting that Turkish guns on the left bank had opened fire on the *Shaitan* and other naval ships. This indicated the arrival of the Turkish advanced guard, and all hope of attempting the salvage of the *Shaitan* was abandoned.* Not long after this General Townshend received information that the enemy's main body had reached Zor, and he thereupon decided to march at 9 a.m. next morning for Umm at Tubul, some ten miles distant.†

On the 29th November the Turkish main force advanced to the vicinity of Kutuniya. The Turkish account attributes Nur-ud-Din's decision not to advance further that day to the action of the British cavalry in driving back the Turkish attack on the *Shaitan*. The force thus driven back had consisted of the advanced cavalry squadrons, the camel regiments, the 2nd Tribal Brigade and some river Arabs, of whom the latter had suffered "bloody losses."

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* Her armament and the essential parts of her machinery had been removed and her crew were now transferred.

† General Townshend says in his book that if he had not had to guard the ships he would have made a twenty or twenty-four mile march, and that Captain Nunn had given him Umm at Tubul as the limit of the shippings' possible journey next day. He evidently, however, misunderstood Captain Nunn, who denies emphatically having made such a request, although he had during the discussion with General Townshend explained the difficulties the shipping had to cope with, owing to the low state of the river and its many big bends. In fact, on arrival at Umm at Tubul the next afternoon he pointed out to General Townshend that, through having to anchor there, the shipping had wasted several hours of daylight.

During the night of the 29th/30th, General Townshend received General Nixon's message asking what troops could be spared to re-open the line of communication. The following reply was sent at 2.30 a.m. on the 30th :—

" Melliss with 30th Brigade, howitzers, one cavalry regiment, marches daylight. Also heavy guns in barges *Mahsoudi* and *Shushan.*"

General Townshend very shortly followed this message up with another, in which he suggested that it was absolutely necessary to concentrate at Kut, and that he would therefore continue his retirement on that place slowly.

The night of the 29th/30th at Aziziya passed without incident, and on the morning of the 30th November the boat-bridge across the Tigris was ordered to be dismantled. The large amount of stores and supplies at Aziziya could not be removed for lack of transport and some of them were destroyed, but much had to be abandoned.

At daylight on the 30th, the heavy guns in barges left for Kut, followed by the remainder of the flotilla, all of which reached Umm at Tubul by about 2 p.m. General Melliss's detachment (16th Cavalry, 1/5th Hants Howitzer Battery, 30th Infantry Brigade* and a section of Sappers) marched off at 8 a.m. for a point near the river about twenty miles distant, arriving there about 4 p.m., without opposition.

The remainder of General Townshend's force moved off at 9 a.m., and arrived at Umm at Tubul about midday. The Cavalry Brigade, acting as rear guard, saw many Arabs and hostile mounted troops in the distance but were not pressed, most of the Arabs being diverted by the prospect of plunder at Aziziya. During the afternoon the Cavalry Brigade remained out in observation to cover the camp, and just before dark sighted some hostile mounted men advancing from the direction of Aziziya.

The camp at Umm at Tubul was roughly rectangular in shape, with its southern face on the river, where a gunboat was placed in position so as to flank the up-river front of the bivouac.† Each infantry brigade was responsible for the security of its own front, the 16th occupying the western, the 18th the northern, and the 17th the eastern face ; the cavalry and artillery being in the centre of the bivouac. At nightfall General Townshend's information regarding the enemy was that they had reached Aziziya.

* Half battalion, West Kents ; 2/7th Gurkhas ; 24th Punjabis ; 76th Punjabis.

† See Map 10.

The Turkish main force did not begin to move forward from the vicinity of Kutuniya until noon on the 30th November, and after reaching Aziziya made a long halt, examining the stores, etc., abandoned by the British. At 4.30 p.m. Nur-ud-Din issued orders for his force to push on to Umm at Tubul, his cavalry being instructed to keep touch with the enemy. While still in Aziziya he had received a message from his cavalry brigade sent at 3.30 p.m., saying :—

> " The enemy is retiring from Aziziya. Patrols are following the enemy. The brigade is continuing its march towards Aziziya."

This message showed a most extraordinary state of affairs, namely, that the Turkish cavalry were actually behind their own main body and were apparently unaware of the fact.

In spite of this message, however, Nur-ud-Din believed that his cavalry were still to his front and in contact with the British.

The advance from Aziziya began about sunset. The XVIII Corps led the way, marching in two columns of divisions, the 51st being on the left. The XIII Corps followed, also in two columns, with the 35th Division on the left. About 7 p.m. a number of lights to their front were seen by the advanced guard of the 45th Division, who took them to be the camp fires of their cavalry brigade. But being suddenly fired upon, they realised that the lights were those of a British camp.

The 45th Division extended its leading regiment (3rd) to face the enemy with field guns in support ; and the 51st took similar action, supporting its leading regiment (44th) with mountain guns. The field guns of the 45th Division opened fire and at once the British lights were extinguished, and for a few minutes British searchlights were turned on to the Turks. In the subsequent darkness and silence Nur-ud-Din came to the conclusion that the British force, which he estimated to be only a weak rear guard, had retired, and he ordered his troops to bivouac where they were, while he sent forward the leading regiment (44th) of the 51st Division with two mountain guns to occupy the British camp as outposts. The Turkish account says that at this time owing to the pitch darkness there was much confusion.

The 44th Regiment moved forward at about 9 p.m., but soon lost touch with the 51st Division and also lost its direction. Meeting no enemy, it finally reached the river bank some distance south-westward of the British camp and halted for the remainder of the night. Meanwhile, before bivouacking, the XIII Corps closed up in rear of the XVIII Corps.

Nur-ud-Din was still unaware that his cavalry were not in touch with the British. They had actually, according to the Turkish account, moved from the north into Aziziya after their main force had left that place, and there "passed the night in drunkenness among this priceless display of plunder." At 1.30 a.m., on the 1st December, Nur-ud-Din issued orders to the effect that the British whom they had just driven out of Umm at Tubul were continuing their retreat to Kut, and that the Turkish army was to continue its pursuit at 9 a.m., the cavalry brigade being told to "continue to maintain touch with the enemy and to observe his movements."

It was between 8 and 9 p.m. on the 30th November that the British camp at Umm at Tubul was disturbed by the outbreak of firing; and as some light shells came into camp it was realised that the enemy were Turks and not merely Arab marauders. The *Firefly* opened fire and switched on a search-light, but quickly extinguished it again as the enemy artillery at once got on to it and hit the ship. The Turkish fire only continued for a few minutes and then all became silent.

General Townshend, from the sound of gun wheels in the distance, came to the conclusion that the Turkish main force must be at hand. Its presence would render a British retreat very difficult, and as till daylight neither the ships nor the force on land could see their line of retirement, General Townshend resolved to await dawn before making any move. He issued orders, however, at 9.15 p.m., that if the enemy were found to be close at hand, he would attack at daybreak by a frontal and enveloping attack combined, in which the cavalry would co-operate on the outer flank. The transport was to be loaded up and ready to march as soon as it became light enough to see; and General Townshend also arranged with Captain Nunn to get his convoy under way at daylight and start down river, leaving a gunboat to co-operate with the force on land.

About 3 a.m. on the 1st December General Townshend sent off an urgent message to General Melliss* instructing him to return to the assistance of the main force at daybreak, moving well to the north so as to envelop or turn the enemy pressing him. This message was carried by volunteers from the 7th Lancers, who succeeded in delivering it to General Melliss by 5.30 a.m.† A

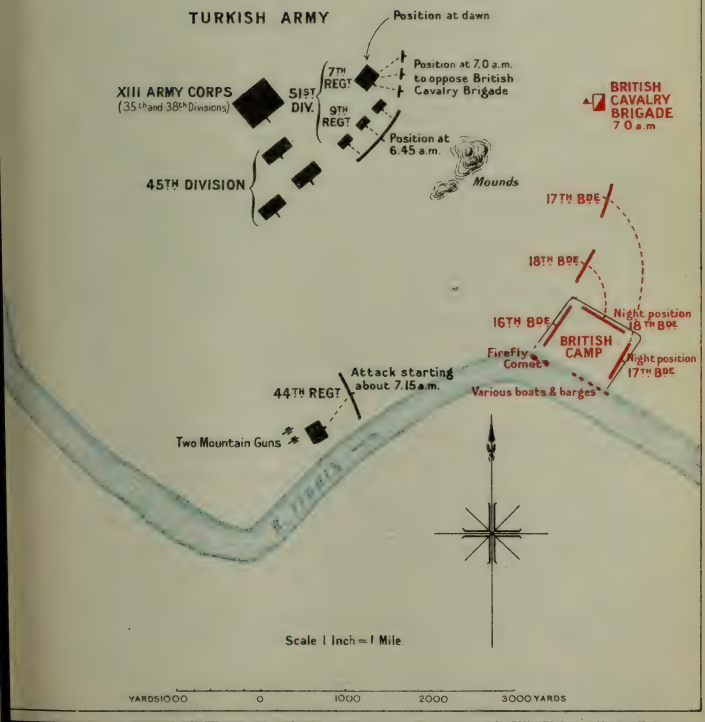
* Encamped about ten miles off towards Kut.

† Captain C. Trench, Lieutenant W. J. Coventry and 13 rank and file. Captain Trench and Lieutenant Coventry were awarded the D.S.O., and the Indian ranks the Indian Distinguished Service Medal

TO ILLUSTRATE

THE AFFAIR OF UMM AT TUBUL.

Positions at dawn, 1st December, 1915.



ARED IN THE HISTORICAL SECTION OF THE COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE

Ordnance Survey, 1924.

duplicate message was sent at the same time down the river in a motor boat, whose crew, however, could not find General Melliss's camp in the dark. Both going and returning, this boat came under heavy fire from the river bank, one of the crew being killed and the remaining two, including an officer, wounded.

At 5 a.m. General Townshend assembled his brigade commanders and explained his intentions for the dawn attack. In accordance with these, the three infantry brigades took up preparatory positions and had all completed the movement by 6.30 a.m. The 16th Brigade remained in their trenches along the western perimeter of the camp, and the two other brigades occupied positions in a dry water channel, which ran approximately northwards from the north-west corner of the camp—the 18th Brigade being in the centre of the line.

Before 6.30 a.m. the British transport column, escorted by the 48th Pioneers, had commenced to file out of camp in the direction of Kut, and the British Cavalry Brigade were beginning to move out to co-operate on the extreme right of the intended British attack.

The Turkish account says that in the dim light about 6 a.m., the outpost battalion of their 51st Division discerned a British mixed column marching south-eastward and another British force moving northward across the battalion front. The 51st Divisional Commander at once ordered his two available regiments to prepare for attack. The 9th Regiment was to direct its left upon the low mounds situated about 2,000 yards north-west of the British camp, and the 7th Regiment was to follow in rear of the left of the 9th. Turkish Headquarters directed the 45th Division to co-operate by advancing on the right of the 51st Division.

Daylight appeared with the suddenness usual in the East; and at 6.45 a.m. the situation became visible to both sides. The three British infantry brigades, each with a field battery in close support, were in line ready for the order to advance, and their cavalry brigade was moving out of camp to the north. The Turkish 9th Regiment had just begun its advance towards the mounds and the 45th Division was preparing to advance on the right of the 9th Regiment. Close in rear, in the Turkish camp, were the XIII Army Corps and the Turkish transport, clearly visible to the British at about 3,500 yards distance.

To cope with this unexpected situation, General Townshend at once ordered the artillery to open rapid fire, and sent off

gallopers to his cavalry instructing them to envelop that wing of the enemy which was closing in towards his right flank and to charge it.

The British artillery and also the guns of the *Firefly* and *Comet* at once opened on the enemy with great and immediate effect. The advance of the 9th Regiment was brought to an instant halt and the 45th Division, thrown into great disorder, rapidly retreated. On the Turkish troops and transport in their camp the effect was still more decisive. The whole XIII Army Corps fled panic-stricken. The situation is described by Muhammad Amin in the Turkish account as follows:—

> "This fire, which opened with a *rafale* of shell . . . . totally disorganised the XIII Army Corps* and 45th Division and kept them for hours out of the battle. From my own observations and experiences I can say without exaggeration that had not the enemy's cavalry come up against the 7th Regiment and been forced to withdraw, they could have ridden over and taken prisoner the whole three divisions before they reached Aziziya."

General Townshend saw that his gunfire was having great effect, though he probably did not realise the extent of the consequent Turkish demoralisation; and in a few minutes the Turkish guns had opened on the British camp and gunboats with some effect, especially among the British transport moving out of camp.

The British Cavalry Brigade moved rapidly, under considerable hostile gunfire, for about a mile and a half northward and then came into action facing west. With "S" Battery, R.H.A., on their left escorted by the machine gun section of the 14th Hussars and with their front to the westward covered by dismounted rifle fire, they gradually pushed men round over the open plain against the enemy's left flank. To meet this movement, however, the Turkish 7th Regiment deployed facing eastward, supported by two mountain guns, and checked the British cavalry advance.

Soon after this, General Townshend, seeing signs of confusion and retirement among the Turks, determined to seize the opportunity of breaking off an action which had been forced on him and which he did not desire.† The 17th and 18th Infantry Brigades had just begun their advance to carry out their original orders when they received instructions from

* The commander of the XIII Corps was killed and the commanders of the 35th and 38th Divisions were both wounded by the British gunfire.

† In his book General Townshend says that he was very much tempted to order a general advance.

General Townshend countermanding the attack. They were now told to cover the retirement of the transport and to retire themselves as soon as the transport was clear of camp. Whilst issuing orders for the retreat, General Townshend's attention was drawn to the *Comet* and *Firefly*, the former being aground and in flames and the latter also evidently in difficulties, but he saw no possibility of helping them.

These two gunboats had both been under heavy gunfire since the fight opened and this fire became increasingly accurate. At about 7 a.m., when the river transport had got clear away, Captain Nunn on board the *Comet* signalled orders to drop down river. At that moment, however, a direct hit on her boiler rendered the *Firefly* helpless. The *Comet* at once moved up and took her in tow, but became herself unmanageable and went ashore on the north bank, where, to make matters worse, she was wedged more firmly aground by a bump from the *Firefly*. The *Sumana*, which was further downstream struggling with two large lighters and had so far escaped the hostile gunfire, was signalled to drop her barges and come to the two gunboats' assistance. Doing so, she made several desperate though unsuccessful attempts to tow the *Comet* off,* while, meantime, the Turks, following up General Townshend's retiring brigades, had entered the British camp and opened fire on the ships at close range with both rifle and gunfire. Captain Nunn was thus forced to the decision to abandon the *Firefly* and *Comet*, both of which were on fire and badly damaged. Under the Turkish rifle fire at fifty yards range, the *Sumana* took off the crews of both vessels and, so heavily laden that her deck was almost awash, struggled on downstream. The two barges she had been attempting to save before were now surrounded by Turks and they also had to be abandoned.

The Turkish 44th Regiment (51st Division), which with two mountain guns had gone astray in the night and had reached the Tigris bank south-west of the British camp, was at first dumbfounded at the situation disclosed by daylight. But its commander was not to be disheartened and decided to advance; and it was his attack that was responsible in the main for the loss of the British ships.

The retirement of General Townshend's infantry began about 7.30 a.m., by the withdrawal of the 16th Brigade, by which time the Turkish 44th Regiment had begun its advance.

* The *Firefly* had managed to get afloat again and was sent drifting downstream but soon went aground again on another shoal.

Some half-hour later the 18th Brigade also withdrew, and finally, just before 8.30 a.m., the 17th Brigade followed. The Cavalry Brigade then commenced a gradual retirement by regiments, and as this was completed the Turkish 7th and 9th Regiments began to advance, inclining southward to gain touch with their 44th Regiment. About this time also the Iraq Cavalry Brigade arrived and came up on the left of the 51st Division.

The whole British retirement was carried out under heavy enemy gunfire and was characterised by great steadiness and precision. The Turkish 51st Division followed only for a short distance, though the Turkish cavalry and some of their artillery carried on the pursuit till about 11 a.m. The Turkish account says that it was not till about noon that their 45th Division and XIII Army Corps were rallied and brought back to join the 51st Division.

When the British Cavalry Brigade had retired for about a mile, General Townshend's force was strengthened by the arrival of General Melliss's column, which came into line between the 17th Infantry Brigade and the cavalry. Leaving his bivouac at daybreak, General Melliss had moved well inland and marched rapidly to General Townshend's assistance.

From now on the hostile pressure was slight, though the Turkish guns continued to fire and the Turkish cavalry to threaten the rear detachments till shortly after 11 a.m., when they finally gave up the pursuit.

General Townshend had determined to shake off the enemy pursuit by long marching, and he decided not to halt till he reached Qala Shadi some twenty-six miles distant. The troops were very tired, Arab horsemen hung on to the flanks and rear of the column, and many private accounts testify to the trials of the march. Darkness came on with the column still marching, and by then the troops were so weary that it required constant effort to keep them going, in spite of the fact that they knew they could expect no mercy from the Arabs. The impenetrable blackness of the night and the roughness of the track, with the growing exhaustion of the men, increased the difficulties of maintaining formation and decreased the average pace, and so the force stumbled on only half awake. The head of the column reached Shadi about 9 p.m., but the rear guard did not get in till the early hours of the next day, and all ranks were thankful to lie down and sleep on the road in column as they were. But even sleep was difficult, as the cold was intense and there was no food to distribute.

The *Aerial* carrying wounded : March 1916.

Wounded being taken ashore from the *Aerial* : March 1916.

On the river the *Sumana*, after being forced to abandon the *Firefly* and *Comet*, had come across more of the transport craft aground. While she managed to get some of them off again, a launch, a motor boat, and a barge containing sick and wounded had to be abandoned.* Owing to the difficulties encountered, the *Sumana* did not succeed in catching up General Townshend's force that day, and at 10.30 p.m. she anchored for the night just below Bughaila. Next day, the 2nd December, she proceeded to Kut. During the retreat the navy had had a most difficult task to perform, and it was through no fault of theirs that so many craft had been lost. These amounted to the *Shaitan*, *Comet*, *Firefly*, three launches, six barges, and all the pontoons and many *danaks* belonging to the bridging train.

Among the rather heterogeneous British river craft was one that deserves special mention, namely the *Aerial*, which, as Candler says in his " Long Road to Baghdad," was half house-boat, half aeroplane. She was 60 feet long by 10 feet wide, weighing 15 tons, and drew 18 inches of water ; and, driven by an aeroplane propeller geared to a motor of 50 B.H.P., burning fuel oil, she could do nine miles an hour.

Her owner, Mr. T. A. Chalmers, a planter in Assam, had offered her with his own services for six months for ambulance work in Mesopotamia, where they arrived on the 26th July 1915, and were attached to General Townshend's force.

During the fighting below Kut on the 27th/28th September she had been employed in carrying wounded from the river banks to the hospitals, and during the retreat from Ctesiphon she was used for carrying sick and wounded as occasion required.

Later she advanced with General Aylmer's relieving force, and was present at all the actions on the Tigris till the fall of Kut on 29th April, 1916. She is mentioned in several accounts as doing most useful work, frequently under fire.†

During the morning of the 1st December, General Townshend sent the following telegrams to General Nixon :—

(1) " Had to halt at Umm at Tubul to help ships‡ and whole enemy's force overtook me at daylight. Enemy in

* A few days later the Turks sent these men into the British camp, saying that as they had so many wounded of their own to attend to, they could not look after these.

† See illustration opposite. Mr. Chalmers was given the C.S.I. for his services.

‡ The accuracy of this remark is disputed by the Senior Naval Officer. See *ante* p. 115, footnote (†).

long lines advancing at 2,500 yards range. I managed to break off action and retire by alternate echelons after fierce fight against overwhelming numbers. We are retiring in perfect order. *Comet* and *Firefly* lost I fear. Will wire later."

(2) *Sent at noon.*

"In continuation. I was informed during battle that *Firefly* had shell through her boiler and smoke seen issuing from *Comet*. Troops were beautifully steady, and only in this way and very excellent brigadiers could I manage it . . . . I recalled Melliss during fight. Marching for Shadi."

To these telegrams General Nixon replied the same day as follows:—

"I congratulate you most sincerely on the splendid resistance you have made. Am deeply concerned, and feel that the best way in which I can assist you is to clear away all shipping and wounded from here (Kut) with escort wing 67th, one company Hants, two mountain guns, to break our way through at Ora.* There will be left at Kut troop 14th Hussars, wing 67th, one company Hants, and some 800 convalescents capable of using a rifle. Am leaving Kut this afternoon."

General Nixon and his staff in the *Malamir*, with ten other ships, escorted by the *Butterfly*, left Kut at 5 p.m. on the 1st and got through safely to Shaikh Saad by midnight on the 2nd, having experienced some slight opposition ten miles above Shaikh Saad from about three hundred Arabs. Continuing down the Tigris, General Nixon reached Basra on the 6th December.

During the 1st December the Turkish main force advanced only a short distance below Umm at Tubul before halting for the night. Their troops were said to be thoroughly exhausted.

General Townshend resumed his retirement at daybreak on the 2nd. The men were hungry and very exhausted, and many of them fell out during the ensuing march. This, however, had been anticipated, and all available transport carts marched in the rear of the column to pick up stragglers unable to march. Fortunately no enemy was seen, though throughout the day the column was harassed to some slight extent by Arab horsemen. After a painful march of about eighteen miles, the force,

* Between Sannaiyat and Shaikh Saad.

excepting the cavalry brigade which went straight to Kut, bivouacked for the night three miles short of it, where some food had been sent out to meet them. The head of the column reached this bivouac about dusk, but the 17th Brigade, forming the rear guard, did not get in till much later, owing to the number of stragglers.

For over twelve days General Townshend's force—largely composed of young soldiers—had been fighting, marching, or working continuously, frequently without sufficient food or water, and often deprived of sleep. This forty-four mile* march coming, under pressure from the enemy, at the end of this period, and carried out in thirty-six hours, was, therefore, a severe test of their discipline. Their soldierly execution of it must arouse our admiration and add greatly to the reputation they had already won.

On the morning of the 3rd December they marched the few miles into Kut without hostile molestation. The Turks, in fact, had been left far behind, and only reached Qala Shadi on that day.

In the engagement at Umm at Tubul and during the retirement of the 1st and 2nd December, the British casualties amounted to 37 killed, 281 wounded, and 218 missing; of the missing 81 were followers belonging to the Supply and Transport, and many of them and of the other missing must have been on the abandoned barges. The Turkish account claims a total of 520 prisoners, of whom, however, 380 sick and wounded were captured on one barge.

The Turkish casualties at Umm at Tubul amounted to 748, of which 633 occurred in the XVIII Army Corps, and of these 488 belonged to the 51st Division. Their total rifle strength before the action is given as: XVIII Army Corps 6,697, and XIII Army Corps 5,400, or a total of 12,097.

There is no return available showing the strength of General Townshend's force at Umm at Tubul, but it is estimated that, excluding General Melliss's force, his effective strength in rifles and sabres amounted to about 6,500.

* General Melliss's column covered fifty-one miles.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE DECISION TO HOLD KUT, AND BRITISH POLICY CONSEQUENT ON THE FAILURE TO REACH BAGHDAD

IT has already been mentioned in Chapter XIV how the accumulating evidence of the imminent arrival of Turkish reinforcements at Baghdad led the Chief of the General Staff in India, in the week preceding the battle of Ctesiphon, to urge the immediate despatch to Mesopotamia of the two brigades of the "Emergency Force." As the week passed, Sir Percy Lake's anxiety in no way lessened, and on the 22nd November—the day the battle commenced—he again put forward the same recommendation. But the Commander-in-Chief in India, having apparently in view the Viceroy's opinion given only five days previously, would for the moment go no farther than order the ships for their transport to be arranged for. Late on the evening of the 23rd, however, the receipt of two telegrams from General Nixon (showing that the Ctesiphon fighting had not achieved the decision looked for and that General Nixon urgently required reinforcements) caused Sir Beauchamp Duff, with the Viceroy's approval, to issue orders for the immediate despatch of the force in question.

The next morning (24th) General Nixon was informed that, of the 3rd (Lahore) and the 7th (Meerut) Divisions from France and Egypt, the headquarters 28th Infantry Brigade and 51st Sikhs were due at Basra about the 1st December, while the three other battalions of the same brigade should arrive about the 2nd December; and one battalion from Ceylon would reach Basra before the 15th December.* Pending the arrival of the remainder of the 3rd and 7th Divisions, India was sending at once to Basra the 1st Home Counties Field Artillery Brigade (T.F.), the 13th Company of Sappers and Miners, and the 34th and 35th Infantry Brigades, which should all have embarked from India by the 6th December.†

* 28th Punjabis.

† 1st Home Counties Brigade, R.F.A. (1/1st, 1/2nd and 1/3rd Sussex Batteries, each of four 15-pounders); 34th Infantry Brigade (1/5th Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey), 31st Punjabis, 112th Infantry and 114th Mahrattas); 35th Infantry Brigade (1/5th Buffs (East Kent Regiment), 37th Dogras, 97th Infantry, 102nd Grenadiers).

The Commander-in-Chief in India also telegraphed to the War Office :—

> ". . . . The Turkish strength disclosed at Ctesiphon and check to Nixon there renders absolutely essential the immediate despatch of two divisions from France and Egypt."

He followed this up with another wire to the War Office (it was repeated next day to the India Office) :—

> ". . . . The losses of British troops in Nixon's last action have been extremely heavy, and we are totally unable to replace them from India. We most urgently request that strong drafts for all British regiments now in Mesopotamia . . . . be despatched at earliest possible moment . . . ."

On the 25th November the situation in Mesopotamia, as disclosed by the telegrams so far received (see preceding chapter), was considered by the War Committee of the Cabinet. Mr. Chamberlain and General Barrow attended the meeting, and one of the questions discussed was the provision of drafts required to bring up the British units to their proper strength. Our own losses had been heavy and the Turks had been found to be stronger than had been expected. The abandonment of the Gallipoli peninsula might throw the whole East into a blaze. It was therefore necessary to make certain that we remained sufficently strong in Mesopotamia and on the North-West Frontier of India. At that time the difficulties of finding sufficient British drafts for the different fronts were considerable, and the War Committee were informed that there was a shortage of 200,000 infantry. It was decided that as a matter of principle all military units in the theatres of war and on the Indian frontier should be kept up to strength, even though this might involve the postponement of the formation of new units, and that in accordance with this principle, the drafts asked for by the Commander-in-Chief in India for the British regiments now in Mesopotamia, averaging 500 per battalion, or 2,000 in all, should be supplied by the War Office forthwith, as well as the necessary drafts for India. The India Office were to request Sir John Nixon to communicate his immediate intentions, having regard to the probable dates of arrival of reinforcements, which should be notified to him, and what enemy forces he estimated were, and were likely to be, opposed to him, and also what forces he estimated he would require to overcome the enemy and occupy Baghdad. He should be told, in forming his estimate, to err, if he erred at all, on the safe side.

In accordance with the above, the India Office sent the following telegram to General Nixon, repeating it to India :—

> "War Committee of Cabinet desire you to report fully by telegraph on present situation and prospects. What is present estimate of numbers of the enemy, Ctesiphon and Baghdad, and what reinforcements can he get before you could again attack? What, if any, troops additional to reinforcements and drafts already promised do you now require to capture and hold Baghdad? Your estimate should be on the safe side. If capture Baghdad has become impossible, report what position you propose to hold, and what troops you require for the purpose. Repeat your answer to Viceroy."

General Nixon replied to this on the 26th November. After saying that, owing to its severe losses (by that time reported as 4,300), General Townshend's force could not be counted on as an effective fighting division for some time, he reported the retirement on Lajj and spoke of the supplies there and of his arrangements for sending up more. The strength of the Turkish force then at Ctesiphon he roughly estimated at 11,000 with 39 guns, but they were ill supplied with transport and ships and had no gunboats; and from previous experience their many Arab auxiliaries were not likely to join in a general action. In regard to a possible eventual concentration of Turks against us, General Nixon referred to a former estimate of nine divisions he had telegraphed to India on the 21st November. Four of these divisions had been at Ctesiphon and the heads of two more might then be arriving at Baghdad. Taking the new divisions at nine battalions of 900 strong each and composed of Ottoman Turks, who did not desert, General Nixon deduced that the enemy's strength in the Baghdad concentration area might, by the second week in December, amount to 27,500 men and 55 guns, by which time he estimated that General Townshend's force could be increased to between 11,000 and 12,000 men. By the end of February, the Turks might, he said, assemble 50,000 men and 84 guns.

With the reinforcements, drafts and artillery promised him, General Nixon considered that he would not be in a position to attack Baghdad until, at the earliest, the beginning of March, when he expected to have an available striking force of some 40,000 men, with 114 land guns, exclusive of 7,000 or 8,000 men on his lines of communication.

He continued: "To effect above I have assumed that my fleet of ships will have been reinforced at a very early date by at least the additional craft recently asked for from India, about the arrival of which I am momentarily expecting to hear. The ruling factor in the rapidity with which our concentration can be effected is the supply of additional river transport. Had we succeeded in seizing Baghdad, the question of additional ships would not have been so acute, as we could have brought up reinforcements by degrees with a smaller number of ships.

"To summarise. Provided that my river transport is immediately augmented to the maximum extent possible, and that all promised reinforcements, *plus* drafts to make good present wastage, reach me by middle January, I consider that I shall be in a position to capture and hold Baghdad by the middle of March 1916 without any additional troops. Should the Russians be able to co-operate with me, my task will be proportionately simplified, and I ask for information as to how far I may expect such co-operation. As I feel confident of capturing Baghdad, I do not propose to discuss the alternative of taking up a defensive line in rear."

On the 27th General Nixon reported General Townshend to be entrenching at Lajj, and mentioned information received indicating a possible Turkish advance by the Euphrates line. On the 28th General Nixon telegraphed that General Townshend had retired to Aziziya, and did not anticipate that the enemy would advance beyond Zor. Should they do so, General Townshend would retire on Kut to cover the concentration of reinforcements.

On the 29th November, in one of their periodical appreciations, the General Staff in India came to the conclusion that the period until February 1916 would be a critical one for our force in Mesopotamia. This was not only owing to the situation on the Tigris between Kut and Baghdad, but it seemed likely that the check we had received would react on the situation in Persia and our relations with the Arabs. In Persia, according to our Minister at Tehran, the situation was developing unfavourably, and, although in the north the advance of General Baratoff's column of 11,000 Russians towards the Hamadan area would probably bring about an improvement, we might expect trouble in the south and about Bushire.* The Arabs might give us trouble in Arabistan and

* The British and Russian consuls and colonies had been obliged by Turco-German activity to leave Hamadan in November. Elsewhere the position of the British and Russian consuls was very insecure.

on the Euphrates about Nasiriya. No further reinforcements could be spared from India, and it seemed, therefore, advisable, in view of possible developments, to ask His Majesty's Government for two divisions for Mesopotamia in addition to the two Indian divisions from France already promised.

At the India Office, on the same day, General Barrow also wrote an appreciation of the situation. After taking into consideration the estimates of respective strengths given by General Nixon, the distance from Baghdad, the probable condition of the Turkish force and their transport difficulties, General Barrow saw no immediate cause for anxiety. He considered it unlikely that, after their experiences at the battles of Kut and Ctesiphon, the Turks would attack with less than a two to one superiority. He concluded, therefore, that we might reasonably hope that the Turks would make no serious attack till the New Year, by which time General Nixon should be fully prepared to meet it, as by then he should have received reinforcements amounting to about 18,000 men.

General Barrow went on to point out the strategic advantages of Kut. With the command of the waterways, as we had, a force posted there in the loop between the Tigris and the Shatt al Hai would be in an extraordinarily strong position, which could not readily be turned, while our communications by the Tigris were fairly secure. The tactical value of the position could not be demonstrated without local knowledge, but, owing to its strategical and political advantages, General Barrow thought that the importance of preparing a position about Kut should be urged on the Government of India.

General Barrow suggested that the detachment at Nasiriya should be withdrawn to strengthen General Nixon's main concentration; for at Nasiriya it would be exposed to attack and could not easily be reinforced. He concluded by stating his anxiety as to the safety of India with its reduced garrison.

Next day, 30th November, the Secretary of State wired to the Viceroy:—

> ". . . . Is he (Nixon) preparing strong defensive position at Kut? Does he still propose to retain troops at Nasiriya? Defence of India—are you satisfied that you will be sufficiently strong with four garrison battalions already arranged and drafts for artillery and frontier troops? Information required for War Committee."

The two first sentences of this telegram were referred by India to General Nixon.

On the same day (30th) the Viceroy telegraphed at length to the Secretary of State :—

" Independent examination prior to receipt of Nixon's telegram of 26th leads us to agree generally with estimate of Turkish strength at Ctesiphon and Baghdad and its rate of growth, except that we prefer to work on the figure 60,000 by end of January as estimated by combined War Office and Admiralty staffs in their memorandum of October 19th.*

" Nixon is correct in his view that ruling factor in rapidity of our concentration is the supply of additional river transport, in which respect you have received repeated requests from us to hasten rate of supplies and we are searching India for suitable vessels. In the meantime Nixon must do the best he can with what he has got, which on a rise of river and by marching troops from Amara should enable him to get the Lahore and Meerut Divisions to Kut al Amara early in February.

" As regards his force, Nixon is in error in counting upon 34th and 35th Brigades, which . . . . are to be withdrawn when replaced by Lahore and Meerut Divisions, as their presence in India is necessary. It follows that Nixon's force may have to be increased from elsewhere and in our opinion a safe estimate for the capture and retention of Baghdad under altered conditions involves addition of at least one more division, which, with the Lahore and Meerut Divisions and drafts, will make Nixon's force five divisions in all.

" This estimate of five divisions, which we consider a safe one, is, however, based on following facts :— (i) That since October 19th, when the joint Admiralty and War Office staff drew up their memorandum, nothing has occurred, or is likely to occur, in the Near East to prevent Turks sending the full amount of reinforcement then considered possible. (ii) That Russia remains inactive in the Caucasus and North-West Persia.

" If, on the other hand, it should be thought that any important modifications in above factors have taken place, or are likely to do so, we consider Nixon will be able to capture and hold Baghdad with four divisions, and that it will not be necessary to draw an additional division from the main theatre unless it were freely available owing to the general strategic plan of operations.

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* See Appendix VIII.

> "To regard capture of Baghdad as impossible would be to give up our best means of countering the German intrigues in Persia and Afghanistan against India and should therefore be dismissed from our calculations. Our success hitherto in Mesopotamia has been main factor which has kept Persia, Afghanistan and India itself quiet, and to give up the idea of Baghdad would be to relinquish initiative and would result in a further transference eastward of the theatre of war. For these reasons we approve Nixon's attitude in not discussing the alternative of adopting a defensive attitude as a permanency, though he must necessarily remain chiefly on the defensive until his reinforcements can reach the front."

When these telegrams were despatched, the latest news received in India and the India Office was that General Townshend was still at Aziziya on the 29th November unmolested, and that he proposed to withdraw to Qala Shadi; and on the 30th, General Nixon sent a telegram to the War Office estimating that altogether six Turkish divisions were approaching, or south of, Baghdad.*

At the meeting of the War Committee on the 1st December the question was considered of sending the additional division asked for to Mesopotamia; but no decision was come to.† The demands for reinforcements from every quarter were such that it was necessary to weigh very carefully our available resources in men in relation to our different commitments and probable requirements. Instructions were, therefore, issued for the War Office to draw up a special review of the general situation upon which the War Committee could decide the allocation of the available forces.

In consequence of the great losses among British officers in the Indian units in Mesopotamia, it was further decided that the War Office was to report as soon as possible to the War Committee on the possibility of returning to Indian service as many as possible of the officers lent to the War Office from the Indian army.

Next day (2nd December) the India Office received a telegram from General Nixon, dated the 1st, reporting

* He gave the probable numbers of these divisions as 26th, 35th, 38th, 45th, 51st and 52nd.

† By then news had arrived that General Townshend was withdrawing slowly from Aziziya to Kut and that the Turkish advanced guard and main body had reached Zor and Kutuniya respectively on the 30th November.

General Townshend's action at Umm at Tubul and subsequent retreat, and saying that he (Nixon) with his staff, and all the wounded not likely to be effective within ten days, were leaving Kut at once by river for Basra to accelerate the pushing up of reinforcements. Sir Percy Cox was remaining at Kut to give confidence to the friendly Arab tribes. There were six weeks' supplies and a good supply of ammunition for General Townshend's force at Kut,* and with reference to the Secretary of State's queries of the 30th, General Nixon concluded his telegram as follows :—

> "Position across Kut peninsula with defence post and blockhouses and whole front covered by wire is now practically finished. Trenches can be dug as required. It is proposed to retain troops at Nasiriya for the present."

At this stage it will be convenient to refer to correspondence in Mesopotamia showing how and when the decision to hold Kut was arrived at. On the 1st December, Brigadier-General J. C. Rimington, commanding at Kut, telegraphed to General Townshend, repeating the telegram to General Nixon :—

> "I find it very difficult to make a definite position covering Kut al Amara that cannot be turned. Enemy would certainly surround us in this position and would hold us with small force, while he would occupy Es Sinn position† against our reinforcements. Alternative would be to retire on Es Sinn. There are about thirty *mahailas* here on which, if decided to evacuate Kut al Amara, we could place wounded and supplies. Please wire early orders, as defensive position should be commenced immediately."

This telegram reached General Townshend on the 2nd December, whilst he was on the march and about the same time as he met General Rimington, who had ridden out from Kut. General Townshend, considering that his force was too exhausted to move beyond Kut, and that it was impossible to move all the supplies and ammunition in time, told General Rimington that he had determined to stand at Kut itself.

On the 2nd, General Nixon telegraphed to General Rimington in reply to the latter's telegram of the 1st :—

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* In a private letter written to Lord Hardinge that day, Mr. Chamberlain expressed his anxiety regarding the safety of General Townshend's force.

† About seven miles below Kut.

". . . . Please tell Townshend that Army Commander must leave situation to him as to how far he falls back, but Army Commander's intention is to concentrate reinforcements as far forward as possible."

Through a staff officer's mistake, this telegram was not brought to General Townshend's notice until the night of the 4th, when he considered it was too late to alter the decision he had already come to. He, however, expressed at once to General Nixon his indignation at the mistake which had prevented his seeing this important instruction before.

Meanwhile, on the 3rd December, General Townshend telegraphed to General Nixon, saying that the enemy were upstream of Qala Shadi, that he was going to defend Kut as it was an important strategic point, and that he had one month's full rations for British troops and two months' for Indian, as well as ample ammunition.* General Nixon at once replied saying that he was glad to hear of General Townshend's decision and that reinforcements would be pushed up with all possible speed.

On the same day General Nixon suggested to General Townshend that he should send a small movable column to deal with hostile Arabs near Shaikh Saad and to form a post there. General Townshend, however, replied on the 4th that he did not consider it advisable to do so, as he was on the point of being invested, the enemy being only ten miles off. He could not feed a post at Shaikh Saad and his men were too weary to move that day. He considered that troops coming up should push forward all posts.

Later, on the 4th December, General Townshend telegraphed :—

" I am making Kut into as strong an entrenched camp as possible in the given time. The enemy's advanced guard is now some ten miles off and the main body five miles beyond that. As it is reported that von der Goltz is at Baghdad now commanding the enemy's army of six divisions, I shall expect him to turn this place, putting off a force of observation at Kut. The relieving force will possibly have to fight another battle at Sinn. I have shut myself up here reckoning with certainty on being relieved by large forces arriving at Basra. The state of extreme exhaustion of the men demands instant rest. I was

* In a later telegram of the same day he said : " I mean to defend Kut like I did Chitral."

very anxious, and it looked at one time on 2nd December as if the whole division would lie down and not be able to move. Our being here will also delay von der Goltz's advance down Tigris and give more time for you to concentrate relieving force on the Amara–Ali Gharbi line . . . ."*

To this telegram General Nixon replied at midnight, 4th/5th:—

". . . . The alternatives to your plan have been carefully considered and Army Commander can only approve your proposal.† Every effort is being made to relieve you as soon as possible and it is hoped to do so within two months. Following points are for your consideration. In view of possibility of your being invested at Kut, it would seem desirable to send back to Ali Gharbi any mounted troops you can spare, superfluous transport, all shipping, gunboats and anything else which may embarrass you later. Any transport which you can send back will naturally facilitate advance of relief force and will save mouths to feed. Please wire at once and say what you propose. Main concentration will now take place at Amara, with covering force at Ali Gharbi . . . ."

This was answered by General Townshend at 11.40 a.m on the 5th :—

". . . . I have sent away all steamers and barges, and am sending away *mahailas*, retaining only *Sumana*. I hope to get bridge to-day and will then send cavalry brigade by right bank to Ali Gharbi, with transport as much as safe to hamper them with. Cavalry Brigade then, less one squadron which I retain, should be off at dawn to-morrow and reach Ali Gharbi in two marches . . . . 'Within two months' is serious. I hope we can be relieved by a month. My rations for British troops are only one month, and fifty-five days Indian troops. I shall have to reduce scale of

* General Nixon repeated to India and the India Office this telegram of General Townshend's.

† In considering these alternatives General Nixon was obliged, owing to his inadequate river transport, to give due weight to the large reserves of stores and supplies that had been laboriously accumulated, mainly by means of convoys of *mahailas*, at Kut. If General Townshend withdrew below Kut it seemed probable, from the information at General Nixon's disposal, that much of this reserve would have to be abandoned or destroyed at Kut ; and General Nixon would have experienced very great difficulty in replacing this at the same time that he had to push up large reinforcements.

rations. Am commandeering all bazaar supplies. Your telegram of 2nd* was only given me last night, to my indignation . . . ."

Half an hour later General Townshend sent another telegram :—

"Enemy still same distance as yesterday . . . . My grand total combatants is 10,398; that includes all kinds of services and cavalry brigade. But of infantry alone I have only about 7,500 combatants."

The same evening General Nixon wired to General Townshend :—

". . . . Army Commander very pleased you are sending back cavalry brigade and transport. This will accelerate your relief. On arrival at Ali Gharbi cavalry brigade will cease to be under your orders and will come under General Younghusband's command when he reaches Ali Gharbi. Mounted troops will probably be sent upstream from Ali Gharbi to Shaikh Saad to keep open land and river communications with Kut as long as possible. In this way investment of Kut may be delayed and further supplies put into your camp. *Malamir* passed Younghusband and 51st Sikhs to-day near Qala Salih. 53rd Sikhs and 56th Rifles also *en route* up river to Ali Gharbi, where 28th Infantry Brigade is being concentrated . . . . Everything well in train for your speedy relief . . . ."

At 9.50 a.m., on the 6th December, General Townshend wired :—

". . . . I have carefully considered your statement of relief within two months, and am convinced that would mean loss of this division, for the whole Turkish force of six divisions would develop long before then; it would be best I think that I should preserve force by retiring to Ali Gharbi and form covering force to the concentration at Amara. To be relieved within a month only would mean a very anxious and trying time, but two months, I am certain, means the loss of this division. My retirement from here should be arranged as soon as possible; I should save most of the ammunition, utilising *mahailas*, and bring away heavy guns. You know the shape and size of the Kut peninsula I occupy. A large force can enfilade peninsula from all points of the compass and render it an *inferno*."

* This was the telegram to General Rimington referred to above.

An hour later General Townshend telegraphed :—

". . . . Have you any news of a Russian movement at Baghdad? as it would make all the difference in look of situation here . . . . I find no lighters are left for my heavy guns and I should have to destroy them if I retreat, also large amount of small arm ammunition."

And again at 12.10 p.m. :—

". . . . Can Army Commander make his concentration Shaikh Saad–Ali Gharbi? This would make my position practically safe, and I should become covering force to the concentration and could fall back on force at Shaikh Saad whenever I wanted to with ease. The fact of troops arriving at Shaikh Saad will keep right bank open; moreover, enemy would be afraid to go round me and sit astride the river at Es Sinn, as he will most certainly do in the near future."

That evening General Townshend reported that the cavalry brigade and transport, having crossed the river, were on the march for Ali Gharbi by 11 a.m. They were being followed up by large numbers of Arabs, both mounted and on foot, who had appeared suddenly from the Shatt al Hai.

At 5.30 p.m., on the 6th, General Nixon replied to General Townshend's three morning telegrams :—

". . . . (1) The period of two months was an outside limit calculating to the arrival of the last reinforcement and the time that would elapse before a general forward movement could be made. It is hoped to quicken this up.

" (2) So far as we know, you are not yet invested nor is the river line cut. Younghusband with 28th Brigade and Cavalry Brigade should be established at Ali Gharbi and Shaikh Saad within the next week and enable supplies to be pushed in to you.

" (3) Retirement from Kut would open Shatt al Hai and have very bad effect, and does not at present seem to be demanded as a military necessity. Of the actual dispositions for occupation of Kut you are the best judge. So far the Turks have apparently made no move. Do you think possibly that they have shot their bolt for the time? They have only five steamers as against our three times that number and more coming. You have 10,000 against 12,000, and you have superior artillery.

" (4) You speak of six divisions. Does this number include 52nd, last reported to be in Baghdad, and 26th,

rumoured to be at or near Falluja, but not in any way confirmed? On 5th instant . . . . you spoke of only three divisions in front of you. You should send aeroplane reconnaissance to see what is going on at Badra.

"(5) Retirement from Kut should only be resorted to as a last extreme. In any case the Sinn position seems indicated, not Ali Gharbi, where you will be on the top of Younghusband. Russians on 4th December were reported three marches from Hamadan and twenty-three marches from Baghdad, and Army Commander is again wiring to Chief General Staff (India) to expedite their advance. It may be possible enemy wishes merely to contain you, while concentrating against Nasiriya. Have you considered this? We are reinforcing Nasiriya at once to provide against this contingency.

"(6) Remember that our large reinforcements arriving daily will have good moral effect throughout the Basra *vilayet*, and Army Commander has asked for another division and more heavy guns. As long as you remain at Kut enemy is in ignorance of your plan, and you are fulfilling duties of a detachment by holding up superior numbers.

"(7) . . . . The concentration Shaikh Saad–Ali Gharbi will be carried out. Taking all these points into consideration, Army Commander does not approve your proposal to fall back on Ali Gharbi."

The reply to this was sent by General Townshend at 4 a.m. on the 7th December:—

"That Younghusband, with 28th Brigade and Cavalry Brigade, shall be at Shaikh Saad and Ali Gharbi within the next week is what I asked for . . . . I am glad you can do it, as it alters altogether my situation here. All the reasons you give that I should remain at Kut were fully considered by me before I decided to shut myself up at Kut, knowing well by history the fate that generally awaits any force in fortress or entrenched camp which shuts itself up. It was your stating you hoped to relieve me within two months which made my situation critical: your placing Younghusband's command and cavalry at Shaikh Saad altogether alters matters . . . ."

He continued in a further telegram a few hours later:—

". . . . I have now some 8,990 combatants after departure of cavalry brigade. Infantry something between 5,000 and 6,000. British regiments practically skeleton

companies in peace time. Sight of sick and weakly men not able to march is a very depressing one. Ammunition ample ; roughly 800 rounds per rifle, 590 rounds per gun, lyddite 208 per big gun. A.Q.M.G. will wire all details.* Although I urgently require aeroplanes, they must leave for Ali Gharbi this morning ; reason, no spare parts, aeroplane barge having been lost ; also will surely be shelled here. I have given them orders to constantly reconnoitre from Ali Gharbi up river as far as Aziziya and especially as regards Es Sinn and enemy's movements around me."

At 7 p.m. the same day (7th) General Townshend reported that his position had been turned by a Turkish division which had crossed the Shatt al Hai about four miles to the southward, probably to invest Shaikh Saad or to occupy Es Sinn. A force of about 1,500 infantry was also reported on the left bank of the Tigris to be turning the Kut position ; and two divisions were west of Kut on the left bank. These movements meant investment.

In India the decision to remain in Kut did not commend itself to the military authorities,† but the Commander-in-Chief considered that the decision should be left to General Nixon. On the 6th December, however, he sent General Nixon the following telegram :—

" Personal. I am urging on both India Office and War Office vital necessity of getting reinforcing divisions to Basra at earliest possible moment, but greatly fear there will be delay, as for several days past enemy submarines in Mediterranean have prevented any ships leaving Marseilles. This makes me anxious in regard to Townshend's position at Kut, as his relief will be delayed correspondingly."

Whether General Nixon realised that this telegram was intended to hint to him that a retirement below Kut was advisable is not known. He replied that General Townshend's

* This wire gave his animals as 1,000 horses, 2,000 mules and ponies, and 100 bullocks, and stated that he had 60 days' supplies for British (except tea, 34, and meat, 30), 60 days for Indians, and 30 days grain and fodder. Fuel was short, but could be supplemented locally.

† On the 6th December the General Staff in India, after calculating that by the middle of January the Turks might be able to concentrate sufficient men and guns in the vicinity of Kut to contain General Townshend's force, and at the same time have some 20,000 men to oppose the relieving force, and taking into consideration the various advantages and disadvantages of holding on to Kut, arrived at the conclusion that the risk of holding Kut outweighed the advantages ; and they considered that Kut ought to be evacuated if it were still possible to do so.

position was receiving his greatest attention, and that he and General Townshend were in constant communication with one another in regard to it.

To return to the general policy of His Majesty's Government. On the 1st December General Nixon protested against a request by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, in London, for the immediate despatch of five hundred to a thousand troops to protect their property against attacks said to be imminent by Germans, as he said that local intelligence indicated no such danger. The Secretary of State, answering this telegram on the 3rd, quoted the opinion of the managing director of the company, who had a thorough knowledge of Arabistan, and of the Admiralty representative, in regard to the danger to the oilfields and the oil supply, as being of considerable importance, but he said that the oil company had been told to instruct their local representatives to communicate direct with General Nixon in future.

On the 3rd December the Viceroy answered the Secretary of State's telegram of the 30th November in regard to the defence of India. The position in India, said Lord Hardinge, depended largely on what happened in Mesopotamia. If, with the reinforcements from France, General Nixon was able to drive back the Turks and occupy Baghdad independently of the 34th and 35th Brigades and could return these to India, then they would probably be strong enough in India, though even so they would wish that all the Territorial troops in India, as well as the Regulars on the frontier, should be filled up by drafts to their proper establishment. If affairs in Mesopotamia went seriously wrong the position in India would deteriorate and they might have to ask for assistance. If Afghanistan joined in against us, our situation would be critical. But Lord Hardinge hoped that it would not be necessary to ask for assistance.

On the same day the Viceroy sent another telegram to the Secretary of State stating that the Commander-in-Chief was most anxious for an early Russian advance on Hamadan, and, if possible, on Kermanshah. He pointed out how this would threaten the Turkish communications down the Tigris, sever German communications between Persia and Turkey, and would gain time for General Nixon to move up reinforcements.*

* On the 9th December General Nixon also telegraphed urging that the Russians be asked to march on Baghdad. Representations had already been made by H.M. Government to Petrograd, but the Russian Government stated that they had not sufficient troops to comply. This information was sent to General Nixon on the 11th.

Writing privately the same day to Mr. Chamberlain, Lord Hardinge described the North-West Frontier situation as promising for the moment, but that the whole situation was dependent on Kabul, where a struggle was in progress between the Amir on the one side and his brother, with many Afghan notables, backed by Germans and Turks, on the other. The set-back at Ctesiphon seemed bound to affect Persia, and if Persia joined our enemies the Amir's difficulties would be enormously enhanced. The internal situation in India was fairly satisfactory, and the utmost was being done to rake up any kind of river craft suitable for Mesopotamia.

On the 3rd, also, General Nixon reported to India and the India Office that General Townshend would hold Kut and had issued all orders for putting into operation his plan of defence. On the 5th he repeated to the same authorities the telegram of the 4th, in which General Townshend anticipated investment and opposition at Es Sinn for the relieving force. In this last telegram General Nixon asked urgently for more heavy guns,* howitzers, and also for another complete division. These demands were, he said, called for by the possibility of the investment of Kut and the large Turkish concentration, and were necessary to ensure British success.

The Viceroy telegraphed to the India Office on the 6th December, saying that it seemed certain that General Townshend would be invested at Kut and must be relieved. It was understood that he had sufficient rations to enable him to hold out for about two months, but the great distances in Mesopotamia really made this a very short period; and it was therefore essential that General Nixon should be reinforced with great rapidity. General Nixon's plans were based on the two divisions from France being complete in Basra by the 31st December, and the Viceroy asked for early information if any delay in their transit was likely. He concluded his telegram by saying that the Government of India regarded the provision of the additional division—making five in all—asked for by General Nixon as necessary, but India could not provide it.

The Viceroy also telegraphed to the India Office on this day, in reply to a telegram of theirs showing that the river craft being constructed in England for Mesopotamia could not be expected to begin reaching Mesopotamia before March, reiterating the vital urgency of the matter, on which depended the possibility of relieving Kut in time. This question will be dealt with more fully in another chapter.

* On the 8th December India told General Nixon that they were sending him the 72nd and 77th Heavy Batteries (each of four 5-inch howitzers).

On the 7th December, H.M. Government decided on the evacuation of the Suvla and Anzac positions in the Dardanelles, and Mr. Chamberlain informed Lord Hardinge of this decision in a very secret telegram for his own information and that of the Commander-in-Chief in India.* Referring to this telegram in his weekly private letter to Mr. Chamberlain of the 9th, Lord Hardinge expressed the hope that a diversion would be made elsewhere to prevent the Turks utilising forces thus released from the Dardanelles to bring too great pressure on the British force in Mesopotamia.

On the 8th the Secretary of State telegraphed to the Viceroy that the whole of the Meerut Division would probably reach Basra by the end of the month, that the Lahore Division would probably begin to leave Marseilles about the 11th, and that the War Office were considering the possibility of providing a fifth division for Mesopotamia. The Secretary of State asked if this fifth division was required only for the eventual advance on Baghdad; but the Viceroy informed him next day that it would be required in any case.

On the 9th December the Secretary of State sent the following telegram to the Viceroy, repeating it to General Nixon :—

> "Essential that we should receive full information regarding situation in Mesopotamia for consideration by War Committee. Please instruct Nixon to telegraph his own and Townshend's views regarding measures to be adopted, feasibility of holding Kut pending reinforcement, or intention to retire to some other selected position. Would latter course mean grave loss of stores and munitions ?
>
> "2. Are communications now threatened or likely to be interrupted during passage of reinforcements or retirement, and, if so, in what area ?
>
> "3. What troops are now at Amara and *en route* ? Also at Qurna, Basra, Nasiriya and Ahwaz ?
>
> "4. Please indicate entrenched position at Kut with reference to Tigris, Shatt al Hai, Kut town and Sinn; and have we boat bridge giving command of both banks ?
>
> "5. Have we accumulated supplies and munitions at Amara or elsewhere on line, thus facilitating reinforcement ?
>
> "6. Have Turks heavy guns superior to ours ?

* From a military point of view secrecy was essential.

"7. Besides *Firefly* and *Comet*, have Turks captured or destroyed ships, barges and aeroplanes, and how many? Enemy boasts numerous captures.

"8. Any other points elucidating situation, such as health troops, temper of population, state of river and weather, number of steamers and flats available for transporting troops."

General Townshend's situation was causing grave anxiety to Mr. Chamberlain, who had gathered from General Nixon's telegrams that the preparations for defence at Kut were still incomplete; and he was much disturbed at General Nixon's suggestion that the transport in Mesopotamia might be insufficient to take up the relieving force. There was uncertainty as to the exact position at Kut occupied by General Townshend, who, Mr. Chamberlain hoped, had not allowed himself to be shut up in the bend of the river, leaving the bridge in the hands of the enemy. Moreover, the course of the war in the Near East was not progressing favourably. There was bad news from the Balkans and the British force operating from Salonika was in considerable danger. Egypt required reinforcement, and Mr. Chamberlain was anxious to see more British units sent to India.

Mr. Chamberlain had asked the General Staff at the War Office a day or two before this to prepare a paper on the military situation in Mesopotamia, with special reference to whether a further withdrawal by General Townshend would be more advantageous than a stand at Kut. In point of fact, however, their opinion was too late, for General Townshend was already invested, and the General Staff memorandum of the 9th December, signed by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (General Sir A. J. Murray), is merely of interest as showing expert opinion in London at the time. The paper stated at the outset that it was doubtful if General Townshend was still able to withdraw if he wished to do so, and that, in the absence of reliable information in regard to the supplies of food and ammunition available at Kut, the opinions expressed had no great value. Briefly stated, General Murray's conclusions were that General Townshend would be justified in making a stand against the enemy provided that local conditions and the state of his troops were such as to warrant the belief that Kut could be held until relieved; that the best policy for the enemy would be to attack Kut if held by us, or to invest and attempt to starve the garrison into surrender while keeping his (i.e.,

the enemy's) main body on the Tigris to fight the relieving force; and that, unless the Turks received a great accession of strength from the Caucasus, and tribal gatherings necessitated large detachments to the Karun and Euphrates, General Nixon should by the middle or end of January have a sufficient force to effect the relief of the garrison.

On the 11th and 12th December General Nixon replied *seriatim* to the questions in the Secretary of State's telegram of the 9th as follows:—*

"1. The question of abandoning Kut was fully considered and views exchanged between Townshend and myself. It was decided from every point of view, military and political, that it was not advisable or even possible, looking to condition of troops on their arrival there, to withdraw from Kut. In this connection see my telegram of 5th. To have abandoned Kut would have entailed grave loss of stores and munitions of war . . . . There is now no question of Townshend withdrawing, as he is virtually surrounded.

"2. Communications are not now threatened downstream of Ali Gharbi. I do not anticipate that they will be to any serious extent so long as Townshend remains at Kut. We have a strong post at Ali Gharbi and reinforcements continue to move up river. (Here follow some remarks as to the attitude of the Arabs.)

"3. (Gave distribution of troops on 11th December.)† It is essential to reinforce Nasiriya. To abandon it would mean laying open the Euphrates line and the Shatt al Hai and expose my left flank to a Turkish advance on Basra. At present the tribes in the vicinity of Nasiriya are well disposed but need signs of support.

"4. Entrenched camp at Kut is on Tigris left bank across neck of peninsula. (Here follow map references.) From Kut town northwards entrenched camp extends 3,200 yards, its breadth roughly 1,700 yards. It is surrounded by enemy on all sides except west at present. Boat bridge which had been . . . . placed east of Kut has had to be demolished. Two battalions occupy village on right bank opposite Kut. Communication with these is maintained by means of *Sumana* and barge. Sinn is some seven miles north-east as the crow flies.

* Sent in two parts and received at India Office on 12th and 13th December.
† For this distribution, see p. 191.

"5. Yes. Supplies and munitions of war have been accumulated at Amara, and these stocks are now being built up with utmost despatch to form a reserve to meet requirements of additional divisions which will shortly concentrate up river. Action is also being taken to build up a reserve at Nasiriya to enable a force to operate from there. Additional advance depots of supply and ordnance are being established at Ali Gharbi to facilitate rapid advance.

"6. Turks are reported to have four 10·5 centimetre guns, which are said to be superior to our 5-inch in rapidity and range.

"7. (Gives details of losses in river craft, etc., in the retreat to Kut.)*

"8. Troops have been very highly tried for past three weeks. There are now 800 in hospital, but General Townshend is convinced there should not be more than 300 when he is relieved. Climate is now cold but healthy. Casualties 7th and 8th December, 18; 9th December, 199. Total force in Kut approximately 9,000. Temper of population depends entirely on our success or otherwise. News of reinforcements constantly arriving and being pushed up river is bound to tell in our favour. Tigris is low at present but expected to rise shortly, which will facilitate navigation. (Here follow some remarks about the state of the Euphrates and anticipation that the Shatt al Hai would not be navigable that year by steamers.) We have at present 13 river steamers and 3 tugs, each capable of towing two barges, and 12 other vessels of lesser towing power, which are used for local and port work. We also have 40 barges of varying sizes and capacity . . . . Of the above steamers two are very old and now require extensive overhaul. Many of the barges require urgent and extensive repairs as soon as others which have been asked for arrive. Generally speaking, each steamer with two barges can carry one battalion of infantry or a four-gun battery, whereas three steamers and six barges are required to move a cavalry regiment with its first line transport. There are under order in England 6 steamers, 3 stern-wheelers, 8 tugs and 43 barges, and India are now endeavouring to supply 17 steamers, 5 stern wheelers, 10 tugs and 64 barges . . . .

* Already given on p. 123.

"9. General Summary. The situation is a grave one Until I know how soon sufficient troops can be concentrated at Ali Gharbi, and I hope Shaikh Saad, with which General Aylmer can commence advance, it is impossible to forecast developments.* Even now I have no definite information as to departures from Egypt except in the case of three units, nor of the order in which units will arrive. I have wired for immediate report.

"Want of adequate river transport is more acute than ever. The net result of my demands in this direction since July last is one ship from India promised at the end of this month. It is hoped that a further supply will be forthcoming from the middle of January onwards.

"As a general question of communications the attitude of Persia cannot be overlooked. As long as present benevolent neutrality is maintained there is no cause for anxiety. Attitude of Pusht-i-Kuh is doubtful. Any concentrated hostile action on part of latter would be a menace to my communications on Tigris and Karun, but signs are at present inoperative . . . . General Townshend may be depended on to do everything that is humanly possible to inspire those around him with his wonderful spirits."

On the 11th December the Secretary of State telegraphed to the Viceroy that, having regard to the pressing demands for troops in other theatres, the War Office would find it most difficult to provide a fifth division for Mesopotamia. Further, experience showed that newly formed divisions of the new armies must not be suddenly thrust into active operations without gradual training under fire among older troops. The Secretary of State, therefore, suggested that he should propose to the War Office that the Government of India should allow the 34th and 35th Brigades to remain in Mesopotamia, and should detail a third brigade from India. These three brigades, with cavalry and artillery recently despatched to Basra from India, would give a fairly complete division, and one better suited for operations in Mesopotamia than a New Army division. The War Office, for its part, to be asked to detail twelve garrison or newly raised battalions for garrison duty in India and to despatch them there in the next

* General Aylmer had been sent from India to take command of the Meerut Division. Soon after arrival he was given command of the Army Corps consisting of the troops concentrating up the Tigris for the relief of Kut.

three months. This would obviate asking the War Office for a fully trained division, would expedite the formation of a trained fifth division in Mesopotamia and would increase the British garrison of India.

At the meeting of the War Committee on the 13th December the situation in Mesopotamia was discussed, but, by a misunderstanding, the Secretary of State for India had not been summoned to attend, and in consequence the Committee did not have before them the latest news from General Nixon. The General Staff memorandum of the 9th December was considered, and the decision come to was that the India Office should send a telegram* to General Nixon recommending that, provided it was possible to do so, General Townshend should retire from Kut down the Tigris; otherwise, that General Townshend, if his force was not too fully invested, should occupy the bend of the river just below his present position. Such a change of position would offer him manifold advantages either for an attempt to cut his way out or for co-operation with a relieving force. This telegram was, however, not despatched, as the latest news from Mesopotamia showed that General Townshend was no longer in a position to withdraw.

General Barrow, "appreciating" the situation that day, had come to the conclusion that unless General Townshend were hard pressed, General Nixon would probably not move forward from Ali Gharbi till Christmas; that the retention of a mixed brigade at Nasiriya was a mistake; that the garrison in Arabistan should be increased slightly so as to protect the oilfields; and that on the whole the progress of our reinforcements and our position on the Tigris was fairly satisfactory. But the situation at Kut, owing to the cramped position occupied by General Townshend, must be a source of anxiety. "Out of 9,000 men we have about 900 sick, and we have had over 500 casualties in five days. At this rate of attrition very early relief may be necessary."

The same day (13th) the General Staff in India came to the conclusion that General Nixon would probably not be able to move his full strength to the relief of Kut before the 1st February. They estimated that by the 15th January the Turks would still be strong enough not only to contain Kut, but also to oppose in superior strength the advance of the British relieving force. The critical period would probably

* Subject to Mr. Chamberlain's concurrence.

arrive about the end of January, if not earlier, for the supplies at Kut would last until the end of January; but the tactical position there was unfavourable, the daily British casualties were considerable, and the possibility of the fall of Kut before relief could not be ignored. Though in North-West Persia the situation had improved owing to the Russian advance, the Russians were too far off to affect the situation on the Tigris.* Looking ahead, it would be well to be prepared to deal with all the Turkish divisions reported as directed on Baghdad, and for that purpose a division, to replace the exhausted 6th Division then in Kut, in addition to the fifth division already asked for, would be required. The General Staff recommended that H.M. Government should be told this at once in order that the War Committee might be warned of the liability. They concluded: "Strength in Mesopotamia means effective co-operation with Russia in stopping the extension eastwards through Persia of the theatre of war."†

On the 14th December General Nixon telegraphed:—

> ". . . . In view of the fact that there are now four divisions—35th, 38th, 45th, 51st—in front of Townshend; that 5th Composite Division is now arriving Baghdad; that 36th Division is reported following it and due Baghdad second week in January; that 17th Division may be following, and that 26th Division is reported concentrating on Euphrates line; making total of eight divisions as possible concentration against me within next two or three months, I must ask for another two divisions to be sent to me as soon as possible, otherwise I may have to fight again without any reserve."

At the War Committee meeting on the 15th December, attended by Mr. Chamberlain and General Barrow, the situation in Mesopotamia was again considered. It appeared that, owing mainly to the Salonika situation, no transports were available and that the 3rd (Lahore) Division had not yet left France. It was decided that the Lahore Division should have first claim on the shipping and that the Admiralty, in consultation with the India Office, should do all in their power to hasten the departure of this division from France; that the Government of India should be notified of this, and also

* On the 9th December a Russian column of twelve squadrons of cavalry, one infantry battalion and six guns were within fifty miles of Hamadan.

† The Amir of Afghanistan had told the German mission at Kabul that he could not break his alliance with the British unless and until a Turkish army crossed Persia into Afghanistan.

that, owing to the transport difficulty, it was impossible for the time being to send the two additional divisions asked for by General Nixon, but that the question would be further considered. As a necessary preliminary to a decision regarding the despatch of reinforcements to Mesopotamia, the General Staff were to circulate to the War Committee a memorandum, on which they had been at work for the last few days, on the future conduct of the war, with special reference to offensive and defensive possibilities in the various theatres of war.* This was to form the basis of a complete scheme for the distribution of our forces.

The Secretary of State informed India and General Nixon accordingly, and added that he learnt from the Admiralty that, with the exception of some details and horse ships, the greater part of the two Indian divisions would reach Basra by the 31st December.†

Referring to the above in his weekly letter of the 16th December to Lord Hardinge, Mr. Chamberlain explained how enormous the difficulties of transport by sea had become. Many ships were required for the transport of British troops to and from Mesopotamia, Salonika, Gallipoli and Egypt, and also for all the French troops destined for the Near East. The amount of shipping taken up by the Admiralty was causing the greatest inconvenience to trade and oversea supplies of food and munitions, and we seemed to have come to the limit of our resources. He added that neither India nor General Nixon must count on England being able to provide the two additional divisions asked for.

On the 16th the War Office sent a telegram to India informing them that events in Mesopotamia were being carefully watched in Germany; that, apart from the question of Mesopotamia itself, it was expected that Turkish success in Mesopotamia would lead to diversion in Persia, with the gradual immobilisation of large British forces; and that the Turkish troops had been informed that they were marching on India.

On the 17th December, in his weekly letter to Mr. Chamberlain, Lord Hardinge gave satisfactory news as to the attitude of the Amir of Afghanistan, and said that, owing to the unusually large number of Ghilzai traders from Afghanistan in India, hostile action was not likely to be taken against the

* General Robertson succeeded General Murray as Chief of the Imperial General Staff on 23rd December, 1915.

† A few days later the India Office found that this estimate was too optimistic and General Nixon was informed accordingly.

British till winter was over.* He also said that he did not altogether agree with the Commander-in-Chief in India as to the necessity for the two additional divisions asked for by General Nixon, as it appeared to him that the number of Turkish troops south of Baghdad had been exaggerated; and he realised that Mesopotamia was only a secondary theatre of war, where a main decisive conclusion could not occur.

On the 18th the Viceroy telegraphed agreeing to the suggestion of the Secretary of State sent on the 11th that India should, in exchange for twelve garrison battalions from England, provide the fifth division required in Mesopotamia. The Viceroy said that the 36th Infantry Brigade would be sent to Mesopotamia to form, with the 34th and 35th Brigades already there, another division.

Mr. Chamberlain was becoming more and more anxious about the safety of the remnant of General Townshend's force in Kut, where by the 18th December 1,100 casualties had been sustained; and it appeared to him that the relief of Kut should be undertaken as early as possible, and that for this purpose General Nixon should concentrate all available troops. Consequently, on the 20th, puzzled by a reported diversion of troops to Nasiriya, the Secretary of State telegraphed to the Viceroy:—

> ". . . . Nixon's telegrams . . . . leave us in some uncertainty as to his plans and as to his reasons for his present dispositions. According to such information as we possess we should suppose that his first object should be relief of Townshend and all available troops should be concentrated for that purpose. After relief of Townshend, protection of our position on Karun side seems to us most urgent matter. But we recognise that his local information may make a different course advisable. Can you throw any light on his plans and reasons for them?"

On the 11th December the Anglo-Persian Oil Company's agents at Mohammerah had telegraphed to their London office that Dr. M. Y. Young† was then negotiating with the Bakhtiaris to protect the company's interests and ensure continuance of work in the oilfields in case of war, and he hoped to succeed. They accordingly deprecated as inadvisable

* These Ghilzai traders come down to India every winter, returning to Afghanistan in the spring, and afford a useful barometer of feeling in Afghanistan.

† This gentleman had great knowledge of, and influence among, the local tribes.

the despatch of British troops into Bakhtiari country. On the 14th the London office telegraphed in reply agreeing as to the inadvisability of the despatch of troops into Bakhtiari country, but they instructed their local agents to press General Nixon strongly for a brigade in the Karun valley ready to advance if necessary on the oilfields. Next day they heard from Mohammerah that Dr. Young had secured guarantees from the Bakhtiaris that they would prohibit entries into their country of any Europeans or their representatives likely to cause intrigues or mischief. Copies of this correspondence were sent to the India Office.

On the 20th December General Barrow, reviewing the situation, considered that the position in Mesopotamia had improved in the last week, and, while our Tigris communication was much safer, he was not sure that danger might not occur from the Karun direction. He pointed out that, while they had heard of Turks marching back to Baghdad, they had no news of the Turks in front of Kut being reinforced. This might mean that von der Goltz intended to contain Kut while operating elsewhere. He might be moving on (*a*) Nasiriya, (*b*) Khaniqin, or (*c*) on Dizful.* Course (*a*) was difficult, but General Nixon was evidently taking steps to meet it; course (*b*) might be due to the Russian advance on Hamadan;† but course (*c*) appeared to General Barrow to be the one likely to be most dangerous, as enabling the Turks to get into touch with the Bakhtiaris and Cha'ab Arabs and to threaten the oilfields and our base on the Shatt al Arab. Consequently, General Barrow thought that this course might be adopted by von der Goltz.‡ He was aware, he said, that neither India nor General Nixon shared his apprehensions about the oilfields, but taking into consideration our former experience in that direction, he was of opinion that it would be wise to anticipate trouble by sending troops to the oilfields and the Karun valley.

On the 22nd December General Nixon, to whom India repeated the telegram of the 20th given above, replied to India :—

> ". . . . The difficulty of reinforcing Nasiriya under existing conditions is probably not realised . . . . Ajaimi

* About 150 miles east of Kut and 80 miles north of Ahwaz.

† Hamadan had been occupied by the Russians on the 14th, and the Turks occupied Qasr-i-Shirin on the 15th.

‡ With regard to the reference to von der Goltz, who was known by then to have assumed command of the Turkish forces in Mesopotamia, we are told by German writers that he had actually little or no influence on Turkish strategy in Mesopotamia at this time.

is reported to be about fifty miles above Nasiriya, on the right bank, supported by Turkish cavalry and guns. It is possible that he is covering a Turkish concentration by the Euphrates line as he did last February and March before the battle of Shaiba. So far, I have only had indefinite reports of Turkish concentration by the Euphrates, but by reinforcing Nasiriya I am in a position to deal with a Turkish concentration on this line, as well as to hold the line of approach by the Shatt al Hai, and to deceive the enemy as to the real direction of my own concentration.

"There is no question about the relief of Townshend being my first object, and every unit that can be spared is being sent up the Tigris as soon as ever it arrives. But you will remember that I was originally promised the whole of the 3rd and 7th Divisions by the end of December, and it now looks as if it would be the end of January before they all arrive.

"As regards the Karun, I am well alive to the possibilities of a hostile movement in that direction, and it was with this eventuality in view that I have already asked for and will require two more divisions.

"The Secretary of State, I presume, grasps the fact that it takes nearly two months to transfer a force like a division from one line to another under conditions as they exist here."

On the 25th December the Viceroy repeated the above telegram to the Secretary of State and added :—

"The above telegram seems to indicate that while Nixon is emphatic that relief of Townshend is his first objective, yet apprehension for the safety of his detachment at Nasiriya lest a Turkish advance down the Euphrates should overwhelm that detachment and then threaten Basra is his reason for his action in diverting reinforcements from Tigris. Nixon must be best judge of dispositions necessitated by local information, but so far as he has reported to us there is no sign of any strong Turkish movement down Euphrates. With regard to Shatt al Hai, so long as we hold Kut it is not clear how the Turks can use the Shatt al Hai as line of approach to Basra, and we much doubt if reinforcement of Nasiriya will deceive enemy as to real direction of Nixon's concentration.

"As regards Karun line, so long as we are strong on the Tigris above Amara we thereby secure oilfields and impress Bakhtiari with sense of our military superiority, and it was understood that when Nixon asked for sixth and seventh divisions, *vide* his telegram of 14th December,* he realised that the strongest argument to support his request was the probability of Turks in the Baghdad direction being increased to 60,000 men and the vital necessity of his being able to maintain his position above Amara in the face of that force. It is this probability which might justify War Committee in despatching two more divisions from the main theatre of war."

On the 24th December the Secretary of State telegraphed to India that as the Anglo-Persian oil supply had now become of great importance in the manufacture of high explosives, the Admiralty wished to emphasise the necessity for maintaining communication through the Karun valley, so far as the military situation permitted.

In the meantime, Suvla and Anzac had been evacuated with unexpected success and almost no casualties; and, in North-West Persia, Kangavar, some thirty miles south-west of Hamadan, had been occupied by the Russians.

The Allied General Staffs had also recorded their opinion that the war must be fought out in Europe and that any diversion of forces to other theatres of war, beyond what was absolutely necessary for defence, was to be deprecated.

In an appreciation of the 27th December, General Barrow assumed that after the failure of the recent heavy Turkish attack on Kut† we might hope for a lull and that General Townshend had at least three or four weeks' supplies in hand. General Nixon must commence active operations to relieve Kut before 7th January, and General Barrow came to the conclusion that he would by then be sufficiently strong to relieve Kut. This opinion was based on the following assumptions: That reinforcements of some 19,000 men and 38 guns had already reached Mesopotamia and more were following soon; that General Townshend's position at Kut, besides containing a division or two of Turks before it, denied the river route to them and consequently prevented them sending a large force, accompanied by heavy guns or other impedimenta, to arrest General Nixon's march; and that the Turks

* See *ante*, p. 148.

† The account of the operations in Kut at this period is dealt with in the next chapter.

could not well resort to their usual tactics of preparing a defensive position, partly for want of time and means, and partly because the *terrain* on the right bank of the Tigris would enable General Nixon to manœuvre them out of such a position.

General Barrow again stated his anxiety about the situation in the oilfields and the danger to our communications and base, concluding that we ought to send a brigade to Ahwaz;* and he was still doubtful of the wisdom of remaining in occupation of Nasiriya.

Assuming the successful relief of Kut, General Barrow then proceeded to discuss the best military policy for the future. In view of the increasing Turkish strength he came to the conclusion that we must abandon all idea of going to Baghdad and that General Nixon must be restricted to the defensive. If General Nixon could hold a position about Kut, so much the better; if not, he would have to fall back at least as far as Amara—possibly to Qurna. In either case he should be at once ordered to prepare strong defensive positions at and about Qurna and in the Shaiba area. General Barrow was not in favour of sending the two additional divisions asked for by General Nixon, for, if we should have anything like 60,000 Turks to deal with, the only reasonable course, in his opinion, was to retire to the Qurna–Shaiba line. "When we have established a firm base in the Shaiba area, Qurna and the Karun valley, we may consider our oil interests as fairly safe and our grip on the throat of Mesopotamia as absolutely secured . . . . With five divisions in so defensible an area, he (General Nixon) can defy the whole Turkish army indefinitely."

On this day (27th December) H.M. Government decided to evacuate the remaining positions in the Dardanelles.

At the War Committee meeting on the 28th the situation in Mesopotamia was gone into fully. The various recent telegrams between the India Office, India and General Nixon, General Barrow's two appreciations of the 20th and 27th December, and a memorandum on the future conduct of the war, signed by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, were all considered. As Lord Kitchener considered that it would be impossible to send from Egypt† the two additional divisions asked for by General Nixon, the idea was abandoned.

* He supported his contentions with letters he had received from the Anglo-Persian Oil Company and from Admiral Slade.

† Troops from the Dardanelles had by this time arrived in Egypt.

The Committee arrived at certain decisions which were embodied in the two following telegrams to the Viceroy on the 29th December :—

" (i) *Official, from the Secretary of State to the Viceroy :—*

". . . . War Office will despatch to India twelve additional garrison battalions beginning next week to enable you to complete and maintain the fifth division for Force ' D.'

" War Committee, taking note of this decision, recommend that instructions be sent to Nixon in the following sense :

" (1) Under existing conditions no hope can be held out that two additional divisions can be spared.

" (2) After relieving Townshend, Nixon's policy should be to act on defensive.

" (3) Defensive positions should at once be prepared about Qurna and in the Shaiba area in case withdrawal from Kut should become necessary.

" Nixon will be in the best position to decide whether Kut should be held after Townshend's relief or whether withdrawal to Amara or Qurna is desirable in the circumstances."

" (ii) *Private telegram from Mr. Chamberlain to Lord Hardinge :—*

" Reference my military telegram of to-day and to make position clear to yourself and Duff.

" General military position was reviewed by War Committee yesterday and following conclusions were adopted on advice of General Staff, subject to revision if circumstances change materially :

" (1) From point of view of Empire, France and Flanders are the main theatres of war.

" (2) Every effort must be made to concentrate maximum strength there for correlated operations of all Allies at proper time.

" (3) An adequate force must be maintained in Egypt for its defence.

" (4) The mission of the force now employed in Mesopotamia to be of a defensive nature.

"(5) For the present rely on the existing garrison of India, reinforced by twelve more garrison battalions, for its defence.

"I am sending separate telegram in the Army Department, giving Committee's instructions to Nixon. Impossibility of sending further divisions makes me concur in Committee's conclusions, but you will of course communicate your views freely if your knowledge of local circumstances causes you to dissent."

On the 30th December the above instructions of the War Committee were telegraphed from India to General Nixon.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SIEGE OF KUT: FIRST PHASE (DECEMBER 1915).

(SEE MAPS 11, 12 AND 13.)

THE peninsula of Kut al Amara,* where General Townshend had decided to make his main position, is some two miles long and one mile broad. In its south-western portion lies the small town of Kut, flanked on either side by palm groves, fruit orchards and the remains of former extensive vegetable gardens. Roughly oblong in shape, the town consisted of a dense collection of about six hundred and fifty houses and huts, built more or less promiscuously, the main part, including most of the well-constructed houses, standing near the bank of the river, but leaving a broad river frontage. Though the town contained some better-class houses, built of burnt brick, about two hundred shops, several cafés, and a few wool presses, the majority of the habitations were larger or smaller mud huts. The shops and cafés were for the most part contained in a covered bazaar, consisting of a series of inter-communicating colonnades with roofs and a large number of small stalls. The main avenue of the town ran east and west, joining another running north and south near the river front.

Kut was the centre of a considerable traffic in grain, most of which came from the Shatt al Hai; and two caravan routes led from it to Baghdad and, northward via Badra, to Mandali. The inhabitants, numbering about 6,000, consisted mostly of Arabs, but included some Jews, Sabians and Nestorian Christians.

There was no drainage system and no attempt had been made at sanitation. On the arrival of General Townshend's force the whole place was indescribably filthy, owing to the insanitary habits of the inhabitants and to the accumulations of refuse and filth on the thoroughfares, the river banks and the immediate confines of the town. Colonel Hehir, General

* The Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (Royal Geographical Society) have ruled that the correct spelling should be Kut al Imara. This ruling was, however, only received after the maps for the first volume had already been printed. Apart from this, moreover, it seemed desirable in this instance to retain for this history the spelling under which the place gained, during the war, an almost world-wide notoriety.

Townshend's senior medical officer, told the Mesopotamia Commission that it was the most insanitary place that the British force had occupied in Mesopotamia.

The ground in the peninsula itself was generally featureless and flat, being in most places below the high level of the river, but across the immediate north-west of the peninsula ran an irregular chain of low sandhills, perhaps fifty feet high; and there were numerous small irrigation ditches coming in from the river at frequent intervals which, at this season of the year, were dry.

The Tigris here varied in width from 250 to 450 yards and had also a varying depth of from six and a half feet at low water to over twenty feet in flood. At this time of the year the water was about sixteen feet below the top of its banks. To the north-east of Kut town a few low sandhills fringed the right bank. There had been a Turkish bridge of boats* a mile downstream of the peninsula, but on the morning of the 2nd December General Rimington had received information from an aeroplane that Turkish troops were marching towards it down the right bank; and he ordered it to be cut immediately and all the boats brought over to the left bank. This was done, but about half a dozen boats, which could not be moved, were left on the right bank.

Just above where the Shatt al Hai took off from the Tigris on the right bank stood the small village of Yakasub. Owing to the existence there of a woolpress—a massive iron girder structure about thirty-five feet high—it was commonly known to General Townshend's troops as Woolpress village. This village had been captured and looted by some of the enemy detached forces on the 2nd December, and General Townshend recaptured it and occupied it on the 3rd, after his arrival at Kut. At the same time he told General Rimington that he wished to have the boat bridge erected between Kut and this village. But General Rimington in his report says that this was impossible, as only about a hundred yards of General Townshend's own bridging train remained and they had not more than one hundred and fifty yards of the Turkish bridge, whereas the river at this place was four hundred and fifty yards broad.†

The peninsula offered considerable advantages for a purely passive defence against Arab tribesmen unaccompanied by

* Made of *gissaras*, a local type of boat used for bridges, usually about thirty-six feet long and ten feet beam.

† General Rimington himself left Kut before it was invested.

artillery, and was consequently a good site for a depot on the line of communication ; and when it was decided to organise there the advanced base depot for the force advancing to Baghdad, arrangements had been made to raise a defensive barrier across the northern end of the peninsula. This barrier consisted of a mud-walled fort at the northern corner of the peninsula and a line of four blockhouses * connected with one another and the fort by a barbed wire fence. At that time it was not the intention that Kut town should be occupied by the garrison, who were to be posted in the blockhouses and the fort. The site for the fort was selected owing to its position at the river bend, where, apart from other advantages, the depth of the river was sufficient at all seasons of the year to allow river craft to moor alongside the bank, and thus avoid the difficult river channels nearer the town.

In the preceding chapter it has been shown how General Rimington, commanding at Kut, had found a difficulty in selecting a suitable defensive position to cover Kut, as he had been instructed to do on the 30th November by General Townshend, and had recommended a retirement to Es Sinn ; and how he learnt on the 2nd December that General Townshend had decided to hold Kut. Consequently, when General Townshend's force arrived at Kut on the 3rd, the barrier above described constituted the sole defence of the position.†

In his book, General Townshend gives fully his reasons for deciding to remain in occupation of Kut. By doing so he would block the advance of the Sixth Turkish Army—which was as dependent as the British force was on water transport—along the Tigris and the Shatt al Hai ; and thus prevent von der Goltz, whose arrival with a large German staff to take command of the Sixth Turkish Army had (he says)‡ been reported, from assuming the offensive and driving the small British force out of Mesopotamia. He would also give General Nixon time in which to concentrate in security the reinforcements then beginning to reach the

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* To hold ten or twelve men each.

† The garrison had been reduced by General Nixon to reopen the line of communication with Shaikh Saad and the few available men had been put on to render the fort better capable of withstanding artillery fire. The three companies and two guns taken downstream by General Nixon returned to Kut before it was surrounded.

‡ German writers say that Goltz's Chief of Staff was a Turk, and that any few German officers he had with him had little to do with the operations round Kut.

country. In regard to this it should be noted that General Delamain's opinion as to the physical condition of the men of his own brigade on their arrival at Kut makes it clear that the exhaustion of the men was not a contributory factor to the occupation of Kut. There is no doubt, says General Delamain, that the men, British and Indian, of the 16th Infantry Brigade were quite fit to continue the retirement after one day's halt at Kut, and he is of opinion that the men of the other brigades were probably just as fit.

General Townshend says also in his book that he realised the disadvantage and danger of shutting up his force in an entrenched camp; but if he did not hold Kut he considered that the Turks, by moving down the Shatt al Hai, could advance on the weak garrison of Nasiriya and on Basra, and, thus turning the British position on the Tigris, force the evacuation of Mesopotamia. It is necessary here to emphasise the fact that, at this time, Generals Nixon and Townshend were both confident that the coming reinforcements would, when concentrated, experience no great difficulty in effecting a junction with the force at Kut. The only difference between their respective opinions was that, while at first General Townshend expected that the junction would be carried out within a month, General Nixon considered that it would probably take twice that time. As shown in the preceding chapter, when General Townshend realised that it might take two months to effect his relief, he proposed a withdrawal from Kut; and only abandoned this proposal when he understood that Shaikh Saad would be the forward concentration point of the relieving force.

He considered and rejected the idea of falling back to hold the Turkish position astride the Tigris at Es Sinn. It was some nine miles in length, and therefore, in his opinion, too large for his force to occupy. Moreover, he says that he could not, in the time available, remove there the necessary large amount of stores, ammunition, and supplies from Kut, without which his force could not remain at Es Sinn; and he knew it would be impossible to get what was required in time from Amara, the nearest depot of supply.*

* It is questionable whether there was then in Amara a sufficient reserve of supplies to have fed General Townshend's force, and, owing to lack of steamers, supplies would have to be sent up in *mahailas*. In favourable circumstances *mahailas* would take about a week to get up from Amara to Es Sinn, but under unfavourable conditions they might take double that period. From Basra to Amara they would take from two to four weeks according to the weather.

It was originally his intention to defend Kut by making his entrenched camp there a pivot of manœuvre from which, by means of a bridge and entrenched bridgehead, he would throw his main force on to either bank of the Tigris to carry out offensive operations as circumstances required or as a division of the enemy's forces might afford him opportunity. Or, if necessary, he could abandon Kut and fall back by the right bank of the Tigris on the approach of the relieving force. As will be seen, however, he considered that the exhaustion of his troops and the short time available made it impossible to carry out this intention and obliged him to adopt an attitude of passive defence.

In selecting his line and in organising his defensive arrangements General Townshend found many difficulties confronting him. His troops, enervated by the hardships they had experienced in Mesopotamia, including a severe hot weather and much sickness, were much tired by their experiences of the preceding fortnight; and although General Townshend got his British troops to commence digging on the 4th December, his Indians were, in his opinion, unfit to do anything but eat and sleep till the next day.* He found that the existing defensive barrier was a disadvantage, but, although it extended unduly his defensive perimeter, he could not afford to leave it outside his defences. One of the reasons for this was that the fort, apart from the command it offered and its position at the bend of the river, contained large quantities of supplies and stores;† and to remove these he could not, in the short time available, spare men from the essential work of entrenching. Another drawback to the position was the line of sandhills immediately north-west of the peninsula. These were just too far off for inclusion in his own line, but, by the cover and command they afforded, would give the enemy facilities for limiting the power of the garrison to emerge for active operations by the only land egress on the left bank.

He decided to occupy and hold Woolpress village on the right bank of the Tigris, to prepare his first or main entrenched line on the left bank along the existing barrier of the fort and blockhouses, and to re-erect the old bridge of boats to the south of Kut town, covering it on the right bank by a bridgehead of three redoubts. Behind the first line on the left bank, two other entrenched lines were to

* Largely owing to the bitter cold wind and rain.

† The remainder of these were stacked on the river bank by the town, some two miles away from the fort.

be constructed, i.e., Middle Line (from six hundred to a thousand yards in rear of the first line) and Second Line, which ran almost due east and west across the peninsula about fourteen hundred yards from the lowest part of the bend.

For purposes of defence the whole area was divided into three sectors :—

(*a*) *The North-East Sector.*—This included the river line between the right of the Second Line and the fort, the fort itself, and the first line up to, but exclusive of, the second redoubt from the right (Redoubt B on Map 11).* This sector was held throughout the siege by the 17th Infantry Brigade.

(*b*) *The North-West Sector.*—This included the remainder of the first line and the river line on the west of the peninsula as far as the left of the second line. This sector was at first held by the 16th Infantry Brigade ; but afterwards the 16th and 30th Infantry Brigades alternately held this sector or formed the General Reserve.

(*c*) *The Southern Sector.*—This included the second line, the river line south of it, and Woolpress village. The 18th Infantry Brigade held this sector throughout ; the 110th Mahrattas and 120th Infantry forming the permanent garrison of Woolpress village, under the command of Major P. F. Pocock.

The General Reserve, consisting at first of the 30th Infantry Brigade, was posted to the north of Kut town by night, while stationed in the town during the day ; and, for the first part of the siege, the main portion of the artillery was located near some brick kilns, about five hundred yards north-east of the town.

Besides the trenches, practically none of which were in existence, there was much to be done in the way of other work necessary for the defence, such as roads and communications, bomb-proof cover, sanitary measures, improvements and alterations to buildings selected for hospitals, etc., and the town itself was to be prepared for defence to form a Keep. All this would entail considerable labour, most of which would fall on the troops.

A military governor was appointed for the town, for which a strong force of military police and a fire brigade had to be organised.

* The four blockhouses being useless against artillery were demolished, and four redoubts took their places.

The question arose of expelling the Arab population. On his arrival at Kut, General Townshend informed Sir Percy Cox * of his decision to halt his force there and stand a siege, with prospect of speedy relief. He continued that in the circumstances the first thing to be done, according to strict military principles, was to turn out the native population, and he asked for Sir Percy's views on that point. The latter, while recognising that the question must be determined by considerations of military necessity, felt bound to remind General Townshend that in view of the wintry weather and bitterly cold nights, most of the women and children so expelled would perish in the desert of starvation and exposure.

After having preliminary enquiries made as to the amount of food available in the town, General Townshend finally decided to allow all *bona fide* householders to remain with their families. This enabled him to get rid of about seven hundred strangers, leaving over 6,000 others of both sexes and all ages. It was then calculated that there was sufficient food in the town to feed these for at least three months.

As regards supplies for the troops, it was estimated that there were some two months' full rations for the whole force, excepting firewood, medical comforts, vegetables and some minor details. General Townshend, at this time, in view of the confidence felt that he would be relieved within this period, did not consider it necessary or, in order to keep his troops fit for further operations after the reinforcements had joined him, advisable to reduce the scale of rations. He assumed that General Nixon, who was informed of the amount of rations he possessed, would send him instructions to reduce the scale if he entertained any doubt that the relief would not be effected within the two months. At the same time, steps were taken to ascertain what supplies were available locally, and his military governor and supply officer were instructed to purchase whatever grain and other supplies they could obtain.

There was sufficient rifle ammunition to give about 800 rounds per rifle, and the amount of gun ammunition, though not excessive, gave no immediate cause for anxiety.† At the same time, in a *communiqué* issued to his force on the

* Sir Percy Cox left Kut for Basra with the telegraph staff on the evening of the 4th December. He offered to remain there, but General Townshend realised that his services would be wasted in Kut, once the siege began.

† Roughly 600 rounds per gun. At the end of the siege, about 8,000 rounds of gun ammunition of all sorts were destroyed to prevent them falling into the hands of the Turks.

4th December, General Townshend, in informing them that he intended to defend Kut and not to retire any further, instructed commanding officers to husband their ammunition and not to throw it away uselessly.

On General Townshend's arrival at Kut, arrangements were made to send downstream all the sick and wounded, unlikely to recover shortly, with the flotilla of ships which was to leave at once for Amara or Basra. All steamers, tugs, barges, etc., except the *Sumana*, four launches, two motor-boats and six barges, sailed from Kut on the 4th.* On this date, according to General Townshend's information, the Turkish main force was about fifteen miles upstream with its advanced guard five miles nearer Kut.

On the 5th December he decided to send the Cavalry Brigade back to Ali Gharbi† and ordered a bridge across the river to be constructed at the fort. The bridging train had lost most of its material during the retirement from Umm at Tubul, but a convoy of *mahailas* from Amara had brought to Kut about the 28th November a large consignment of planking and beams; and with these, supplemented by material from the dismantled Turkish bridge, a bridge was completed by 8 p.m. to a sandbank, separated from the right bank by only a twenty-yard wide stretch of river, in which the water was three feet deep with a hard bottom.

It was on this day that the first signs of a Turkish approach manifested themselves. Turkish guns sent shells into Kut, among the infantry working parties and against the fort; and a squadron of the 14th Hussars on outpost duty to the north-west came under shell and rifle fire.

On the morning of the 6th the Cavalry Brigade started to cross the bridge on its way to Ali Gharbi; but after the leading squadron and a section of horse artillery had crossed, the sandbank and the short unbridged stretch of water became practically a quagmire, and a further length of bridging had to be erected to cover it. This delayed the crossing and the column got off at about 12 noon. Its march was at once followed up by a large number of Arabs,‡ who appeared from the Shatt al Hai, but these were held off without much difficulty, and the column covered about fifteen miles before halting at nightfall.

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* Some forty or fifty *mahailas* remained.

† Apparently as the result of General Nixon's telegram sent on the night 4th/5th, referred to in the preceding chapter.

‡ Some eight hundred hired camels, with their local drivers, who chose to leave, followed the cavalry. Many of the camels were looted and their drivers killed or wounded by these Arabs.

Three hundred transport carts and all the cavalry, except a squadron 7th Lancers* and a squadron 23rd Cavalry, accompanied the column; but "S" Battery, R.H.A., left two guns behind in ordnance charge at Kut (owing to casualties in men, horses, and ammunition wagons), thus becoming a four-gun battery.

After the departure of the Cavalry Brigade, the strength of General Townshend's force in Kut amounted to 301 British officers, 2,851 British other ranks, 225 Indian officers, 8,230 Indian other ranks, or a total of 11,607 troops, and about 3,530 followers. Excluding sick and wounded and deducting artillery, cavalry and technical troops, this gave General Townshend about 7,000 effective infantry.†

There was a total of 43 guns, comprising nineteen 18-pounder quick-firing guns of the 10th Brigade, R.F.A.,‡ two 13-pounder quick-firing guns left by "S" Battery, four howitzers of the 1/5th Hants Battery, four 5-inch guns of the 86th Heavy Battery, two 4-inch guns of the 104th Heavy Battery, four 15-pounders of the Volunteer Artillery Battery, and eight naval guns (four 4·7-inch in horseboats, a 12-pounder and two 3-pounders in the *Sumana*, and a spare 12-pounder intended for the *Firefly*).

All the infantry units were much reduced in strength. For instance, on the 4th December the effective strength of the Norfolks was seven officers and 234 other ranks, of the Dorsets twelve officers and 315 other ranks, and of the Oxfords eight officers and 332 other ranks. Of the Indian infantry battalions the strongest was the 103rd Mahrattas, with five British officers and 546 Indian ranks, and the weakest was the 104th Rifles, with two British officers and 329 Indian ranks.§

During the 6th December Turkish guns fired a certain number of shells into Kut from the north and north-east; and the British divisional cavalry in observation on the sand-hills north of the peninsula were subjected to a harassing fire by enemy snipers, in consequence of which they were withdrawn. It was on this morning that General Townshend telegraphed to General Nixon suggesting a withdrawal to Ali Gharbi, and it was probably with the idea that this might be necessary that, as soon as the Cavalry Brigade had all crossed the river, he issued orders for the bridge at the

* Left behind to strengthen the divisional squadron (23rd Cavalry).
† For detail of units, see Appendix XIII. ‡ One was a spare gun.
§ *Vide* "My Campaign in Mesopotamia" (Townshend), Appendix, Part IV, p. 353.

fort to be dismantled and to be re-erected at a site farther upstream, where it would be in a less exposed and a tactically better position.* The dismantling work continued throughout the night 6th/7th, and at daybreak on the 7th the re-erection of the bridge was begun at the new site. To cover this work, a company of the Oxfords was ferried across the river in a barge by the *Sumana*, which remained at the right bank throughout the day. No signs of any enemy on the right bank were seen during the day, and at nightfall, when about 120 yards of the bridge had been completed, the *Sumana* brought the Oxfords' company back to the left bank.

During the 7th December there were increasing signs of Turkish activity.† An enemy force, estimated at a division, with eight guns, entrenched itself on the Tigris right bank north-west of Kut; on the left bank, also to the north-west, were some 1,500 Turkish troops, with guns; and five or six miles upstream were the greater part of two Turkish divisions. Throughout the day the Turkish guns on the right bank shelled Kut; and during the afternoon enemy infantry from the north-east, under cover of a considerable bombardment,‡ managed by the use of dead ground to reach an irrigation cut about four hundred and fifty yards to the north-east of the fort.

It is convenient to review here the British situation and dispositions at Kut on this date (7th). Owing to the exhaustion of the troops and the bitter cold and rain storms, it had not been possible to start serious work on the entrenchments till the 5th December, but from that date onwards the whole force worked incessantly.

The two remaining effective aeroplanes were sent off to join the force at Ali Gharbi on the 7th, as, owing to the loss during the retreat from Umm at Tubul of the Air Service barge, there were no spare parts for these machines available in Kut. Three damaged aeroplanes, which could not be repaired for lack of spare parts, with some details of personnel, were left in Kut.

In the north-east sector, held by the 17th Brigade under General Hoghton, there was much work to be done, especially in the fort, which, as it was some distance out and therefore

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* See Map 11.

† This day the Turkish Commander-in-Chief, Nur-ud-Din, sent a letter demanding General Townshend's surrender. To this only one reply was possible.

‡ This caused thirty British casualties in the fort during the afternoon.

liable to be cut off, appeared to be a weak point. On the other hand, it commanded two long stretches of the river, enfiladed part of the range of sandhills, provided flank defence for the first line of trenches and afforded a good observation station for artillery.* Strenuous efforts were made to improve its defences and to render it better able to withstand artillery fire ; but from the very beginning the Turks selected it as a special point for attack and their increasing artillery fire interfered considerably with the work on it. For instance, on the 5th, Turkish gunfire killed there nearly all the horses of the Maxim Battery and damaged badly the buildings in it. Outside the fort, trenches and a redoubt had to be dug along a portion of the first line, with the usual support, reserve and communicating trenches ; and further trenches were required for piquets along the river bank, for the brigade reserve, for cooking places, brigade headquarters, etc.

The garrison of the fort formed a subordinate command under Lieutenant-Colonel Brown, 103rd Mahrattas, and consisted of two 15-pounder guns of the Volunteer Battery, the Maxim Battery, fifty bombers of the Oxfords, the Sirmur Company of Sappers and Miners, 103rd Mahrattas and 119th Infantry. The trenches (in this sector) outside the fort were occupied alternately by the Oxfords and the 22nd Punjabis, the battalion not in the trenches forming brigade reserve close to brigade headquarters.

In the north-west sector lay the greater part of the first line of defence, including three of its redoubts, and here also there was much additional work to be done in preparation of the usual subsidiary trench system. The soil was clayey and in places very hard ; and by the 7th December, though the blockhouses had been demolished, and redoubts constructed, they were not yet connected up by trenches. The work here, as elsewhere in the area, was much interrupted by the constant enemy rifle fire, which continued day and night and caused many casualties.

In the southern sector, commencement of the second line of defence, the defences of Woolpress village, trenches for piquets along the river bank and protection for parties getting water were the main points requiring immediate attention. Kut town was also in this sector and much subsidiary trench work had to be done there. Communication with Woolpress village

* At first a stack of bags of *atta* (coarsely ground flour used by Indians) in the centre of the fort was utilised as an artillery command and observation post.

was kept up by the *Sumana*, the launches and motor boats, by which means also the village garrison was kept supplied with food and ammunition.

The main British artillery position near the brick kilns was occupied by the 63rd Field Battery (six guns), 86th Heavy Battery (two 5-inch guns) and the 1/5th Hants Howitzer Battery (four howitzers). In the north-east sector, in addition to the two 15-pounders in the fort, the 76th Field Battery were posted near 17th Brigade headquarters. In the north-west sector the remaining two 15-pounders of the Volunteer Battery were at first located close in rear of the left of the first line. The remaining guns were posted in the southern sector: the 82nd Field Battery in the most northerly palm grove to the north-west of the town, with the two 4-inch guns of the 104th Heavy Battery to the east of this grove; two 5-inch guns of the 86th Heavy Battery near the river bank west of the town, and near them in barges on the river the four naval 4·7-inch guns. Owing to the situation of the British force, its artillery fire had necessarily to be divergent, whereas the Turkish guns had all the advantages of being able to bring a converging fire to bear on Kut.

At this time General Townshend was apprehensive of a determined enemy attack on his unfinished defences, and he was afraid that the *moral* of a number of his troops had suffered as a result of their exhausting retreat and subsequent investment by the enemy. In particular he considered that the small number of British officers remaining in the Indian units was an especially disturbing factor.

But the Turks showed no great inclination to come rapidly to close quarters. During the next few days they began their investment by a converging movement on both banks of the river, north and south of the Kut peninsula. Advancing against the northern British front, the Turkish infantry, in extended order, moved as far forward as they could under the British gunfire, and then dug themselves in and began to sap forward. In this way they began the formation of a network of trenches which was soon to close the neck of the peninsula. At the same time, a force, estimated by General Townshend as a division, crossed the Shatt al Hai about five miles from the Tigris and approached the eastern flank of the peninsula, threatening the British bridge of boats and blocking the British line of retreat.

On the 8th December, in a *communiqué* to his troops, General Townshend said: "I am glad to tell you that I am promised

by the Army Commander that our relief force will be concentrated at Shaikh Saad, some thirty miles away, within the next week"; and he reminded them again of the necessity for a careful use of their ammunition.

That day the whole of the Kut peninsula and the British first line of defence was heavily shelled by Turkish guns from the north, north-east, north-west and from the right bank of the Tigris. This fire did much damage to the walls of the fort, and to the supplies stored inside it, setting fire to stacks of fodder and food; and much was destroyed before the fires could be extinguished. Although the garrison had been working day and night, the communication trenches and dug-outs in the fort were still very incomplete, and consequently insufficient cover existed there against such a bombardment.

The boat bridge across the Tigris was completed on the evening of the 8th, and two hundred rifles of the 67th Punjabis (30th Brigade), having moved across to the right bank to protect it, spent the night entrenching themselves at the bridgehead, and on the sandhills beyond. General Melliss, commanding the 30th Brigade, after posting this detachment of the 67th, had met General Townshend at the bridge that evening, and had pointed out that, if the detachment was attacked and rushed by night, reinforcement from the 30th Brigade would probably not be able to arrive in time to prevent the Turks getting a lodgment across the bridge. For by night the 30th Brigade, as general reserve, occupied a position some distance away in support of the two brigades holding our foremost line on the landward side of the Kut position.

Early on the morning of the 9th December, General Townshend instructed General Melliss to withdraw the 67th detachment from the Tigris right bank, and General Melliss sent out orders accordingly. General Townshend also issued orders for the bridge to be dismantled. The work on this had scarcely begun when enemy snipers appeared on the sandhills to the south. By this time General Melliss had himself arrived at the bridge. He found that the 67th had come back as ordered, but in view of the situation he ordered them to cross the bridge again, occupy the sandhills, and keep off the hostile snipers. General Melliss then galloped off to report the situation to General Townshend in Kut town, giving orders *en route* for reinforcements from the 30th Brigade to proceed to the bridge. General Melliss had barely met General

Townshend on the roof of the latter's quarters, when, from this position, they saw lines of Turkish troops advancing towards the bridgehead held by the 67th detachment.

General Melliss at once galloped off again to the bridge. There he found most of the 67th with a number of wounded retreating across the river. General Melliss crossed the bridge, and ordered the retirement of the remainder. Captain Gribbon, commanding the 67th detachment, had been mortally wounded, the other British officer with the detachment severely wounded, and an Indian officer killed. The retirement was effected, General Melliss bringing up the rear; and the Turks occupied the trenches dug by the 67th to protect the bridge. Soon afterwards the 2/7th Gurkhas and other reinforcements came up and prevented any possible attempt by the enemy to cross during the day.

In his book, General Townshend says:—

> "As there was a danger of the enemy forcing his way across the bridge in the night, I ordered it to be destroyed under cover of darkness by explosives. It was successfully demolished during the night 9th/10th December, by Lieutenant Sweet, of the 7th Gurkhas, and Lieutenant Matthews, R.E., with a party of volunteers, consisting of Gurkhas and Sappers and Miners. This was a most gallant affair, the two officers going to the enemy's side of the river, across the bridge . . . . and laying the *saucisson*, while the others stood by to cut the anchor cables. With the explosion the bridge broke up. The enemy were for some time too dazed to open fire and the whole party escaped. I recommended the two British officers for the Victoria Cross and the men for the Indian Order of Merit."*

During the 9th the whole of the Kut position came under heavy Turkish shell fire from all directions, the fort attracting special attention and being also subjected to heavy rifle fire at close range. About 3 p.m., after a heavy bombardment, Turkish infantry, who had massed under cover of the sand-hills, advanced in successive extended lines and attacked the first line of the north-west sector. But they were quickly checked by the British rifle, machine gun and gun fire, and then brought to a complete halt.

* Lieutenants Sweet and Matthews were awarded the D.S.O. General Townshend says: "They volunteered for what appeared certain death, for the enemy had this bridge at the mercy of their rifles at 300 to 400 yards range and were firing down on to it. They waited all day to carry out the operation under cover of darkness—a very different proceeding from doing it on the impulse of the moment."

The Turks must have dug hard during the night to consolidate their position about six hundred yards from the British first line, for, to the astonishment of the British force, they had, by daybreak on the 10th, dug themselves down out of sight.

The total British casualties on the 9th December amounted to 199.

British aeroplane reconnaissance from Ali Gharbi that day reported the following Turkish dispositions: At Shumran Bend * and above were camps of considerable size. Near the camps were three paddle steamers, one tug and ten barges. Upstream from Shumran as far as Bughaila nothing was seen. From the left river bank, four miles above Kut, an occupied line of trenches ran in an east-north-easterly direction. One mile behind this line a second weakly-occupied line of trenches, three and a half miles long, ran in a north-easterly direction. On the right bank of the Tigris to the east of Kut was a bivouac of 500 men and four guns behind the sandhills near the river bank. No further troops were seen on the right bank. About 2,000 men were camped five miles north-east of Kut, and there were tents at the Sinn position believed to be occupied.

During the 10th and 11th December the Turks continued their heavy bombardment of the Kut defences, and the Turkish infantry, in spite of severe losses, slightly advanced their line all along the British northern front.† In a telegram of the 11th to General Aylmer's headquarters, General Townshend reported that he had expended over 61,000 rounds of rifle ammunition on the 10th, and, being very anxious about the ammunition question, hoped for relief within ten or fifteen days.

On the 11th December, as the result of experience gained during the previous days' fighting, General Delamain, commanding the north-west sector, decided to move the two Volunteer 15-pounders back from their position behind the left of the first line to a position some hundreds of yards to the right rear and nearer his own headquarters. This move was effected after dark; but when daylight came the new location of the guns was again found unsuitable, and a fresh position near the right front of the line so as to enfilade the enemy's line of attack was selected during the night 12th/13th. Gun pits were constructed here during the next night and the guns moved into them during the night 14th/15th; but once

* About five and a half miles above Kut.

† On these two days the British casualties amounted to 331.

again daylight proved the position to be unsuitable, being within three hundred yards, and in view of, recently constructed enemy trenches. Consequently, on the night 15th/16th the two guns were again moved, and were a few days later placed in a position to the south-east of the town.* The experience of these guns is quoted as showing the difficulties experienced by the garrison owing to the fact that the Turkish investing fire practically limited movement within the defensive area to the hours of darkness.† This had the further disadvantage of depriving a great part of the garrison of their sleep.

About 6.30 p.m. on the 12th December the Turkish infantry, from their advanced line some five hundred yards distant, again made a fairly determined attack against the northern front of the north-west sector. For about an hour they persisted in their attempt and brought a heavy rifle fire to bear on the British line; but without avail, and the attack died away. An attempt to renew the attack at dawn on the 13th was also quickly suppressed. In this attack the Turks were reported, by prisoners captured later, to have suffered very large casualties.‡ The steadiness of the Indian troops of the 16th Brigade in beating off this attack is testified to by a staff officer in his diary, wherein he expresses his admiration of the way in which certain Indian officers commanded companies, for which there were no British officers.

Woolpress village was also subjected to heavy rifle fire on the 12th, but the Turkish assault against it did not materialise. On this day the total British casualties amounted to eighty-eight.

General Townshend's views on the situation on the 13th December are shown in the following telegram despatched to

* To fire south to east to deal with a possible attack from across the river.

† Many casualties occurred from the Turkish long-range rifle fire, whose bullets falling at a steep angle came into most unexpected places.

‡ The number of these was placed by the British as high as 2,000. Oberstleutnant von Kiesling, in his book "Mit Feldmarschall von der Goltz Pasha in Mesopotamien und Persien," says that in the attacks during the nights 9th/10th and 10th/11th, by which Nur-ud-Din hoped to carry Kut by assault, the Turks had some 800 casualties. He also says that von der Goltz, who reached Nur-ud-Din's headquarters on the 12th, forbade further attempts at assault. Kiesling, who did not arrive himself at Baghdad till the 16th December, is evidently not thoroughly acquainted with the facts, as he makes no mention of the attack on the night 12th/13th, which must presumably have taken place after Goltz's arrival.

Nur-ud-Din appears at this time to have been under the impression that only a portion of General Townshend's force had remained in Kut. Von der Goltz, on the other hand, says von Kiesling, maintained that General Townshend had retained the bulk of his force, and it appeared to Goltz better to invest and blockade the force in the hope of starving it out.

General Aylmer, who had assumed command of all troops, including General Townshend's force, on the Tigris, on the 10th December :—

> " . . . . My casualties are roughly 150 to 200 a day up to date and this alone keeps my small arm ammunition question all right . . . . I quite agree with you about danger of attempting my relief with anything under strong division . . . . No one can accuse me of over-anxiety or too much caution ; but the truth remains that our great danger is if the enemy in greatly superior numbers makes a determined assault . . . . We have very few British officers with Indian regiments ; our casualties have been so heavy, well over 5,000 since and including Ctesiphon battle. There is distinct danger of our gun ammunition running short, though I husband it as much as I can. The *moral* of some of my troops is certainly not what it was, to say the least of it. I had to relieve one unit out of trenches last night, as the Brigadier-General said he could not guarantee the safety of his sector unless it was taken away at once . . . . "

From this date for ten days there was a period of comparative quietude, during which the Turks, apparently as the result of the failure of their previous attacks and the orders of von der Goltz, confined themselves to conducting regular siege operations.* Their artillery fire was reduced in volume, although their " snipers " became most enterprising and energetic.† A further contributory cause for the decrease in Turkish activity may have been the withdrawal at this period from the Turkish force of nearly 2,000 infantry and four guns to Baghdad, mentioned by Muhammad Amin in his " Baghdad and the Story of its Last Fall." They were withdrawn for what he terms the " deplorable Persian adventure." This pause in the Turkish attacks not only afforded the British garrison some much needed rest, but gave them time and opportunity to strengthen the defences ; and the *moral* of the Indian troops improved considerably in consequence. By the 15th December the British had good entrenchments and communication trenches in all necessary directions. The first line was finished, the second line had been roughly completed and the middle line had been begun ;‡ and daily

* The daily British casualties also decreased ; for the nine days, 13th to 22nd, they totalled 498.

† A British counter-sniping detachment was organised, with good results, under Major Booth.

‡ This line was completed by Christmas Day.

improvements were being carried out to the defences of Kut town, where General Townshend was apprehensive that he might finally have to make a house to house defence.

On the night of the 14th/15th the garrison of Woolpress village made a small successful sortie, in which they drove the enemy out of a trench he had occupied within two hundred and fifty yards of the village.

On the 14th December General Townshend estimated that the Turkish force investing him amounted to roughly 12,000 men, with 33 guns. This estimate was confirmed by an aeroplane report sent him by General Aylmer. Of this total of 12,000, General Townshend placed some 8,500 on the left bank of the river (including 3,000 in the Turkish front line trenches), 1,500 scattered round Kut in small detachments on the right bank; and 2,000 horsemen on the left bank. These latter, however, were seen on the 15th afternoon moving down the right bank towards Es Sinn.

On the 18th December information was obtained from prisoners that the Turkish force was still only composed of the four divisions which had fought at Ctesiphon, but that two more divisions, the 26th and the 52nd, were expected daily. General Townshend, who had known that the 52nd Division was expected to have completed its concentration at Baghdad, was considerably perturbed at this news and he telegraphed to General Nixon saying that he trusted that the Russians were being asked to menace Baghdad seriously and thus take the strain off Kut.

On the 20th December the effective combatant strength of the Kut garrison amounted to 9,185.

Kiesling gives in his book the text of a report on the situation sent by Goltz to Constantinople on this date (20th). In this he reported that the situation was worse than he had expected. Although the 51st and 52nd Divisions had arrived, he saw little chance of success against a determined co-ordinated advance by the British and Russians. The Turkish infantry present were the best of the three arms, but the artillery were inferior and were armed with old guns and old ammunition, and the engineers were indifferent. Goltz considered that the Persian project could only be undertaken as subsidiary to the operations in Mesopotamia. Kiesling says that Goltz had come to the conclusion that it would be impossible to carry Kut by assault, and that the Turkish force was not strong enough to invest Kut and at the same time detach a force downstream to oppose the British relieving force.

In his opinion the best plan was to invest Kut and keep the main Turkish force in a position close below it to await developments, in the hope of starving out the garrison.

The fort at Kut was undoubtedly a weak point in the defence. North-eastwards and within half a mile of it two irrigation channels ran northward from the river bank, each, with their banks, giving a depth of from five to six feet. These afforded excellent cover to an assailant, and, as already related, on the 7th December the Turkish infantry had managed to reach and occupy the nearer of these two channels, just over four hundred yards from the fort. For the next few days they were hard at work digging and sapping forward all round the north and north-east walls. By the 17th their sap-heads had got so close that a trench raid was arranged for that night to check the enemy's advance and ascertain if he was mining. The raiding parties, consisting of infantry, sappers and bombers, started just before dawn under cover of artillery, machine gun and rifle fire from the Kut garrison. The raid met with complete success, forty Turks being killed and eleven taken prisoner, and the parties returned with only one man slightly wounded, having ascertained that no mining work was in progress.

The Turks, however, immediately recommenced to sap forward and also to destroy the barbed wire entanglement with bombs; and it became evident that they intended to assault the fort. At an early stage of the siege it had become clear to the defenders that the walls of the fort would not stand much bombardment, so that trenches and low-level loopholes had been constructed along the walls and inside the fort, and a stockade with head cover of bales of forage had been built across the gorge of the north-east bastion. Saps had also been pushed out under the fort walls and across the ditch to the edge of the wire entanglements towards each of the enemy's saps. All this entailed continuous hard work on the garrison, who had to spend most of the nights in repairing the damage done by day and in otherwise improving the defences;* and for the first few weeks they were further hampered by the continual fires among the combustible stores belonging to the Supply and Transport Corps.

To turn now to the action, in the meantime, of the small naval contingent. The main rôle of the *Sumana*, which at this time was stationed alongside the river bank near the

* Much of the success of the defensive arrangements was due to the fine work of Captain Colbeck, R.E., and the Sirmur Sapper and Miner Company, of which he was in charge.

town, was to support the garrison of Woolpress village. Owing, however, to the low state of the river, its navigation after dark was hazardous and consequently supplies were generally taken across to the village by launches or motor boats. Just upstream of the *Sumana* the four horse-boats, in which were the 4·7-inch guns, were anchored in pairs, being controlled by the military artillery officer in command of them from an observation tower on shore close by. They and the *Sumana* were much harassed by enemy gun, machine gun and rifle fire from the right bank. In consequence, Lieutenant Tudway, R.N., commanding the *Sumana*, placed a 200-ton barge on the exposed side of his ship to act as a shield against hostile fire. This was about the 12th December.

A few days later the enemy brought a gun down the right bank opposite the *Sumana* and at dawn opened rapid fire on her, but fortunately only damaged her upper works. The British guns on the river front—two 5-inch, one 18-pounder and two 13-pounders—at once replied and silenced this enemy gun, apparently disabling it, for it never fired again. Some four days later the enemy renewed their attempts to sink the *Sumana*, opening fire on her at 2,500 yards range with two 16-pounders, but again only hit her upper works; and these Turkish guns were silenced in half an hour by the *Sumana's* 12-pounder, assisted by the guns on shore. After this the *Sumana* moved a little farther downstream, where she was less exposed.

On the 24th December the Turks made their most serious and sustained effort to carry the Kut defences by assault;* and, as had been expected, their main attack was launched against the fort.

Before it was light the action opened with a very heavy Turkish gun and rifle fire directed against Woolpress village. This continued till 8.30 a.m., but it was not followed by any assault. In the meantime, at about 7 a.m., a heavy artillery bombardment was opened on the town, the first line of defence to the north and the fort. It soon became evident, however, that the main Turkish effort was directed against the fort, whose defenders estimated that the enemy had concentrated twenty-two guns against them; these being posted in a semi-circle extending from the north-west to the river on the south-east.

* According to Kiesling, Nur-ud-Din carried out this attack in Goltz's absence and against his distinct orders, Goltz being then at or on his way to Kermanshah.

THE FORT AT KUT:

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO

THE TURKISH ATTACK ON 24TH DECEMBER, 1915.

PREPARED IN THE HISTORICAL SECTION OF THE COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE

Ordnance Survey 1924

At a very early stage of the bombardment the two Volunteer 15-pounders were totally disabled, and telephone communication between the fort and its artillery support and the Artillery and Brigade headquarters was destroyed. Though telephone communication to Brigade headquarters was subsequently restored, that with Artillery headquarters* and the supporting artillery remained broken for the rest of the day.†

Much of the Turkish fire was directed at the walls on the northern and north-eastern faces of the fort with great effect. Bit by bit the walls crumbled, leaving large gaps through which the garrison could see the nearest Turkish trenches; and by 11 a.m. little remained of the north-eastern wall or the north-eastern bastion, and large sections of the northern wall were in ruins. In fact, the north-eastern bastion became so shattered as to be untenable and its garrison were withdrawn to either side of the stockade across its gorge.

This bastion and the northern wall were held by the 103rd Mahrattas, and the north-eastern wall was held by the 119th Infantry, whose Rajput company held the trenches outside the eastern corner of the fort. The stockade was held by thirty men of the Oxfords, who, in case of assault, were to be reinforced by the men of the Volunteer battery, to whom bayonets had been issued in view of such a contingency.

Between 11 a.m. and 12 noon the bombardment ceased. Immediately the Turkish infantry emerged from their trenches and launched a heavy assault mainly against the north-east bastion, but also against the north-eastern wall, on both of which they effected a lodgment.

A furious fight ensued at the bastion. The assailants were met with a hail of bullets and bombs;‡ and Captain Freeland, the Volunteer battery adjutant, dashed up to reinforce the stockade with the greater part of his gun crews. Here they joined with the Oxfords in pouring a rapid fire at the sea of yellow jackets and long bayonets on the broken walls in front of them. At the same time the bombers of the Oxfords and 103rd rained bombs "into the brown," four of the machine

* General Smith, the C.R.A., had broken down in health and Colonel Grier, his successor, had been wounded; and on the 24th, Lieut.-Colonel Courtenay, the acting C.R.A., and his staff officer, Captain Garnett, R.F.A., were both mortally wounded by the same shell, which also killed Captain Begg of the Ordnance.

† Telephone communication with Divisional headquarters remained unbroken.

‡ General Townshend's force was not equipped with bombs. Those used were made in Kut by the Royal Engineers, being mainly of the "jam-pot" variety.

guns brought an effective cross-fire to bear on the intruders, and from their supporting position the 1/5th Hants howitzers and the two 4-inch guns of the 104th Heavy Battery poured as heavy a fire as possible on to the previously registered adjacent Turkish trenches. But the Turks continued to send forward reinforcements and this desperate fighting lasted for about half an hour. Then the Turks, beginning to waver, finally turned and ran, pursued to the battered walls by the unbeaten remnant of the defenders, shouting in triumph.

In a few minutes all firing here ceased, the attack being over for the time being. The Turks, leaving many dead behind them, had vanished into the cover of their trenches; and the gallant Oxfords, 103rd and Volunteers had time to look about them and to count their losses, which had been very heavy.

In the meantime, on the north-eastern wall, the assaulting Turks had driven back a great part of the 119th, but not for long. Major A. J. Anderson, commanding the Volunteer Artillery Battery, who had been in the observation post, was following up his men to the stockade, when he found his way blocked by men of the 119th, who appeared to be without British officers.* Collecting as many of these men as he could and finally meeting one of their remaining British officers, Major Anderson led them forward with great gallantry and succeeded in driving back or killing all the Turks who had reached the eastern wall. In this operation he was materially assisted by the Rajput company of the 119th, who had held their trench outside the fort with great staunchness and brought a heavy enfilade fire to bear on the assailants.†

During the afternoon, except for some desultory shell fire, all remained quiet. The Oxfords, from the Brigade Reserve—only some two hundred rifles strong—came up and took over the line previously held by the 119th, whose Rajput company, however, remained in the trenches outside the eastern corner. The fort garrison worked hard at collecting the wounded, clearing the perimeter of *débris* and generally repairing the shattered defences as far as possible. But, before dark, the enemy were seen to be receiving considerable reinforcements; and preparations were made to meet another assault.

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* All but two had become casualties.

† Major Anderson's Madrassi servant, Chakharia, displayed special gallantry at this time in taking in to Kut on his back a wounded gunner and then returning again to assist in the fort.

Colonel Lethbridge of the Oxfords was now in command of the north-east corner of the fort. A company of his men—fifty strong—and the Volunteer artillerymen held the stockade, and in front of them a party of the 103rd held the shattered walls of the bastion. The fort walls—or what remained of them—to the westward and eastward of the bastion were held by the 103rd and Oxfords respectively. Captain W. F. C. Gilchrist, 52nd Sikhs, of the Divisional Staff, had been temporarily attached to the Oxfords and commanded their company on the extreme right as well as the Rajput company of the 119th. It was arranged that the party of the 103rd in the bastion, under Captain Goldfrap, after firing at the first signs of an assault, should retire right and left to the side galleries, thus uncovering the stockade and allowing of a cross-fire from three directions to bear on the assailants.

It was as the moon was rising behind clouds and haze, about 8 p.m., that the second attack started. The Turkish infantry headed by lines of bombers dashed at the bastion, from which, as arranged, the 103rd retired into the side galleries. Rapid fire was at once opened from the stockade, but smoke and dust in the difficult light made it hard to distinguish details, in spite of flares. The enemy bombers immediately got to work and very soon the 103rd in the side galleries were almost wiped out, while the casualties at the stockade had also been very heavy ; and for a time it looked as if the stockade would be outflanked. The din was appalling, as in addition to the local machine gun and rifle fire and the bursting of bombs, the supporting British heavy guns and howitzers were keeping up a heavy stream of lyddite shells on the enemy trenches and one of the field batteries of the 10th Brigade was also assisting with shrapnel and star shell.* For nearly an hour the fire from the stockade kept the assailants of the bastion at bay, though the defenders suffered severe casualties and the machine gun in the centre of the stockade was put out of action. First, the sepoys working it were hit one by one, and then Captain Dorling, R.F.A.,† attempted to work it ; but he found that the gun was disabled, and then he himself was wounded. Soon after this one of the enemy's rushes brought them within more effective bombing distance ; and one of the Turkish bombs falling right among the defenders

* Up to this time the War Office had been unable to supply any high-explosive shell for the field batteries in Mesopotamia.

† Forward artillery observation officer in the fort. When telephonic communication was destroyed, he took an active part in the defence.

killed or wounded most of those on the right half of the stockade, including Major Anderson and Lieutenant Mellor, commanding the Oxford company. This left only a handful of men on the stockade and for a time the position appeared most critical. But fortunately the Turks did not or could not seize their opportunity.* Major Anderson succeeded in getting together enough men to hold on to the stockade; and the fight here settled down to a fire combat at close quarters.

About 11 p.m. the 48th Pioneers—about two hundred strong—who with the Sirmur Sappers had been working at a second line of defence just outside the fort, reinforced the stockade, and the remnants of the Volunteer Artillery Battery were withdrawn to join the fort reserve. The 48th Pioneers at once became involved in a stiff fight and the greater part of the first thirty of them to man the stockade were either killed or wounded, including their commanding officer, Captain Neumann. But other Pioneers, under Lieutenant Raynor, took their place and gallantly defeated all the Turkish efforts to get over or round the stockade; and their action finally turned the scale. The Turkish attacks began to weaken and then finally about midnight the Turkish infantry withdrew.

About 2.30 a.m., however, they returned to the assault once again, but the Pioneers were not to be dislodged, and this time the Turks gave up the contest altogether and the remainder of the night passed quietly. Thus Christmas Day dawned on a definite Turkish repulse, and, as it turned out, on their last serious attempt to take Kut by assault.

The attack had been delivered by the 52nd Turkish Division, just arrived from the Caucasus army, and from subsequent statements of prisoners it was learnt that they had suffered at least 2,000 casualties.

At about 3 a.m. the Norfolks from the town arrived and took over the defence of the stockade from the 48th Pioneers; and a few days later took over the defence of the northern wall from the 103rd, whose numbers were considerably reduced.

In the meantime the northern and north-eastern walls had also been assaulted. But the 103rd and Oxfords respectively had held their own, the successful defence by the latter owing much to the skilful dispositions on their right made by Captain Gilchrist.

The British casualties in the fort had amounted to 315 killed and wounded (including seventeen British officers),

* The Turkish account has not yet been published, but it is known that they suffered very heavy casualties here.

and elsewhere than in the fort to sixty-seven.* The fighting at the north-east bastion had been responsible for a large proportion of the casualties. Of the original party of thirty Oxfords, no less than twenty-three were killed or wounded; and of the thirty-three effectives present with the Volunteer Artillery Battery, only fourteen remained unwounded. The 103rd Mahrattas suffered ninety-three casualties,† the 119th sixty-three, and the 48th Pioneers twenty-five.

The Volunteer Battery had earned a name for themselves which any troops might be proud of. Composed largely of Anglo-Indians‡ and with several boys among them who had come straight from school to Mesopotamia, they had shared with the Oxfords the honour of holding the stockade through the most critical period of the assault. The Oxfords maintained fully their reputation as one of the old "Light Brigade"; as an officer of another corps who had been alongside them since their landing in Mesopotamia describes their conduct, "They need no mention—they were the Oxfords." The 103rd Mahrattas showed no loss of *moral*, for they fought splendidly, as did the Rajput company of the 119th and the 48th Pioneers.

On Christmas morning masses of Turkish dead were seen lying round the fort walls, and among them lay a number of badly wounded Turkish infantry. The garrison made several attempts to bring these men in, but the Turks always stopped such attempts by rifle fire, causing the British several casualties. These attempts were therefore abandoned and all that could be done was to throw over waterbottles and bread to them.

On the 29th December a letter from the officer commanding a Turkish regiment in the vicinity of the fort was sent in to the fort asking for permission to bury their dead. General Townshend replied that he could not grant an armistice for this purpose unless the Turkish supreme commander asked for it. The subsequent correspondence on this question led to no result and the garrison and attackers both suffered from the smell of the mass of decomposing bodies.

The British casualties in Kut since the 4th December now totalled 1,625, but for the rest of the year the garrison experienced comparative quiet, although the Turks at this time began shelling the Kut area by night. Hitherto they

* The whole of the Kut area was under constant bombardment before and during the attacks.

† The company mainly engaged lost seventy per cent. of its strength.

‡ i.e., of mixed parentage.

had usually limited their bombardment to two periods in the day, i.e., from dawn till about 9 a.m. and from 4 p.m. to dusk—probably owing to the absence of mirage at these times.

On the 26th December two large Turkish columns, estimated at two divisions, were seen at Shumran bend crossing a pontoon bridge from the left to the right bank of the river, where large camps were being established seven or eight miles west of Kut town. At first, owing to the simultaneous movement of transport westward, General Townshend received the impression that the Turks were beginning a retirement. But he soon found that this was not the case.

By the 31st December the defences of Kut had reached a satisfactory stage. After the Christmas Eve assault the defences of the fort were much improved and a retrenched line to the south-west of it was constructed. The successful defence of the fort did much to increase the confidence of the garrison in their ability to hold their own; they were still on full rations, and their general health, which had improved since their arrival in Kut, was fairly good, though there was a certain amount of dysentery and pneumonia, with a few cases of *beri-beri*. The hospital arrangements were as satisfactory as could be expected in the circumstances.*

The sappers in Kut did excellent work throughout December in improvising siege weapons of warfare, with which the division had not been equipped. At first the Turks had a great advantage over the garrison in the matter of bombs, but the sappers soon put matters on a better footing. Commandeering every available mirror in the place, they turned out a sufficient supply of periscopes; and they devised a few efficient and ingenious trench mortars, at first of wood and then from the cylinders of a 70 h.p. "Gnome" aeroplane engine.

The Arab inhabitants of the town caused General Townshend much anxiety, and in his book he says that he regretted his clemency in having allowed them to remain there. They were in constant communication with the enemy, and, although their arms had been collected, General Townshend had reason to believe that they had buried or concealed many rifles; and, although he had taken hostages from among them and kept

* The hospitals were located in the covered bazaars and a few other buildings in the town, where they had a total accommodation for about 1,450 patients. Many patients had consequently to be discharged in a convalescent state to be looked after by their corps' medical officers. The hospitals were constantly under fire and casualties there were of almost daily occurrence.

them in custody, he was always afraid that the enemy might induce them to rise in the night, when an attack was in progress against the northern front. They also gave much trouble by looting whenever opportunity offered.

The year terminated in the confident expectation of the garrison that they would soon be relieved by the force under General Aylmer, of whose concentration at Ali Gharbi they got regular news.

CHAPTER XIX.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE RELIEF OPERATIONS.

(MAP 13 AND MAP OF LOWER MESOPOTAMIA.)

AS already related, as soon as he realised that the advance on Baghdad had failed, General Nixon started downstream in order to accelerate the forward movement from Basra of reinforcements coming from Egypt, France and India. These reinforcements consisted of the 3rd (Lahore) and 7th (Meerut) Divisions from Egypt and France, and a field artillery brigade, an Indian cavalry regiment, a company of sappers, and two infantry brigades from India.*

On the 29th November, when General Nixon found that, owing to the attack on the line of communication between Kut and Shaikh Saad, his arrival and that of the Inspector-General of Communications at Basra might be delayed, he sent a telegram to General Gorringe, then at Amara,† instructing him to proceed at once to Basra to organise the despatch upstream of the coming reinforcements. General Cowper, of General Nixon's staff, knowing the shortage of river transport, had recommended that the reinforcements should move upstream by route march, accompanied by *mahailas* as second line transport; and General Gorringe, on his way down to Basra, which he reached on the 1st December, made preliminary arrangements for the necessary road making along the Tigris banks and for bridges over the various waterways, including the old and new channels of the Euphrates. On the 2nd December the first of the reinforcements reached Basra, namely the headquarters of the 28th Infantry Brigade (7th Division) under Major-General Sir G. J. Younghusband, and the 51st Sikhs. These were transhipped to a river steamer at once and proceeded up the Tigris the same day.

On the 4th, General Nixon arrived at Amara‡ and left there a memorandum of instructions to await General Younghusband, informing him of General's Townshend's intention to hold Kut

* Shortly afterwards India also arranged to send two heavy batteries.

† General Gorringe was on the point of starting for Kut, where he had been ordered on the previous day to proceed, to organise matters on the line of communication.

‡ General Nixon delayed his movement downstream to stay with the wounded, whose condition on the river steamers caused him great perturbation, in order to see that everything that was possible with the inadequate means available was done for them. For the same reason he stayed for a day at Amara visiting the wounded and hospitals there.

against the Turks, who were following him up. This Turkish pursuing force probably consisted, said the memorandum, of the four divisions which had fought at Ctesiphon, but the 52nd Division might have joined them. Their numbers might thus amount to between 12,000 and 19,000, with from 31 to 58 guns, and General Townshend had only some 8,000 to 8,500 effective sabres and rifles, with 43 guns, to oppose them. Large numbers of Kurdish and Arab irregulars were also with the Turks, and two small hostile columns were reported to have been despatched via Badra against our line of communication, where there had already been some fighting near Ora.

General Younghusband was told that the object of first importance was to get reinforcements to Kut, where it was intended, if circumstances permitted, to concentrate immediately the 28th Brigade. This, however, depended on what action General Townshend had been able to take, and General Younghusband would have to get into communication with him from Ali Gharbi. Further reinforcements were due at Basra immediately and would be pushed forward at once, but their destination would depend upon the movements of the enemy and upon whether General Townshend could remain at Kut or was compelled to withdraw further back. Having been thrown temporarily on the defensive, it was our object, said the instructions, to place our forces in a position to secure our occupation of the Basra *vilayet* and then once more to resume the offensive up the Tigris.

The memorandum then went on to mention briefly some other factors affecting the situation, namely, the possibility of a Turkish attack down the Euphrates against Nasiriya; the situation in Persia, the oilfields and the Karun valley, and the possible effects there of the news of our retirement; as well as the hope that the Russian force in North-West Persia might cause a diversion in our favour by attracting Turkish forces from the neighbourhood of Baghdad.

The memorandum concluded by saying that von der Goltz* was said to be due at Baghdad on the 5th December, and that on arrival at Kut General Younghusband would come under General Townshend's orders.

On the same day (4th), however, General Nixon heard from General Townshend that while he expected the Turks, then

* The aged German Field-Marshal had been placed in command of all the Turkish forces south of Mosul, which included the operations in Mesopotamia and Persia. According to Major-General von Gleich, in "Vom Balkan nach Baghdad," the German supreme command considered that Goltz was too old for the work and, coming to the conclusion that he was completely in the hands of Enver, had advised him in October 1915 to return to Germany. Goltz, however, was induced by the Turks, and especially by Enver, to remain.

only ten miles off, to oppose the advance of the British reinforcements and at the same time leave a force in observation of Kut, he considered that his own occupation of Kut would so delay the Turkish advance down the Tigris as to give General Nixon time to concentrate the reinforcements on the line Amara-Ali Gharbi. General Nixon thereupon, on the 5th December, after suggesting to General Townshend that he should send back to Ali Gharbi any mounted troops he could spare, and all shipping, transport, etc., which might embarrass him in case of investment, amended his former order to General Younghusband by telling him to proceed to Ali Gharbi and establish the 28th Brigade there as covering force to the main concentration. The 6th Cavalry Brigade on arrival from Kut would also come under General Younghusband, who, in order to keep open land and river communication with Kut as long as possible, was to occupy and hold Shaikh Saad with a mobile force equipped with guns, provided that such action did not involve serious fighting. Steps would be taken to push up supplies to Ali Gharbi with a view to sending them on to General Townshend when feasible.

With regard to the supply situation at Kut, General Townshend had reported on the 3rd December that he had one month's full rations for British troops and two months' for Indian. On the 7th, however, he reported that he had sixty days' supplies for both British and Indian troops. Owing to the fact that supplies at Kut were still being unladen from *mahailas* and barges, that they were stacked at various positions in the peninsula, that it was still uncertain what supplies were procurable from the local inhabitants and that the work of sorting them out was much impeded by hostile gun and rifle fire, it took General Townshend's supply officers some days to ascertain the exact state of affairs. On the 11th December the Assistant Director of Supplies at Kut telegraphed to his departmental superiors with Generals Nixon's and Aylmer's headquarters reporting that he then had a balance of fifty-nine days' full rations for British and Indian troops, except for meat. Even this statement, however, proved subsequently not to have included all the foodstuffs eventually found to be available.

General Nixon had based all his calculations on getting to Baghdad; and had not made any special arrangements for pushing up rapidly from Basra the two reinforcing divisions, whose advent he had considered it necessary, for military reasons, to keep a secret from everyone, except a very few

senior officers, until the day of the battle of Ctesiphon. He had asked India to send any river steamers at all suitable for the work, pending the arrival of those under construction in the United Kingdom; and he calculated that, supplemented by these and by Turkish steamers and *mahailas* he hoped to capture at Baghdad, his river craft would suffice to bring the troops he required in sufficient time to Baghdad. But, as shown elsewhere, his calculations as to getting river steamers from India in sufficient time were to prove illusory. Consequently the failure to reach Baghdad and the retirement from Ctesiphon were to prove of far greater disadvantage than, even at that time, seemed to be the case.

General Nixon had to face a very difficult problem; and unfortunately at this time his own state of health was most indifferent. The strain on him ever since the battle of Ctesiphon had been very great and within a day or two of his arrival at Basra on the 6th December his health became much worse; but he continued to carry out his duties until they proved too much for his strength. At the beginning of January 1916 he became so seriously ill that he was obliged to telegraph to India asking to be relieved.* It seems probable that General Nixon felt strongly that a change in command at such a critical period would be most undesirable in every way; more especially as it had just been decided that his Chief Staff Officer, General Kemball, was to take over command at once of the 28th Infantry Brigade in place of General Younghusband, promoted to the command of the 7th Division. But whatever General Nixon's reasons may have been, or whatever may be said as to the expediency of his decision to remain in command, his courage and fortitude must arouse our admiration.

Two great difficulties to be combated were the shortage of river steamers and the inadequate facilities at Basra for rapid disembarkation from ocean-going vessels.

The first of these was partially and temporarily met by the construction of a track up the right bank of the river from Basra to opposite Amara. Thanks to the energy and ability of Generals Gorringe and Rimington (C.R.E.), and to the excellent work of the 12th Company of Sappers and Miners and the 107th Pioneers,† this road, including the construction of eleven bridges over channels varying in width from fifty to six hundred feet, was fit for use by the 14th December.‡

* Until he himself reported that he was unwell, the authorities in India had no idea of the state of his health.

† In 7th Division. Reached Basra 6th December.

‡ Naturally much further work on it was required and carried out subsequently.

On the 28th November General Nixon had asked the Senior Naval Officer at Basra to ascertain whether ocean-going steamers could be brought up to Qurna; as, if this were feasible, it would much decrease the distance to be covered by river steamers. The idea, however, was found to be impracticable owing to the mile-long shallow just below Qurna;* and though for a time two shallow-draught ocean-going steamers were utilised to bring troops up to a point below this shoal, the procedure proved of little practical benefit and was abandoned.

As related in Chapter XIV, General Nixon learnt in November that the first of the steamers and barges under construction for his force in England could not be ready to leave that country till March 1916. His immediate requirements, therefore, could only be met by acquiring and despatching to Mesopotamia as quickly as possible such suitable river craft as were already in existence.

As soon as the vital importance of sending him additional river craft became evident, owing to the news of the retreat from Ctesiphon and of the possible investment of General Townshend's force, the authorities at the India Office and in India increased their efforts to obtain and despatch steamers and barges with the least possible delay. The India Office managed to secure promises of earlier delivery of some of the craft under construction and they invoked the assistance of the Admiralty and the authorities in Egypt in acquiring existing vessels. In India the marine authorities sent further lists of steamers, which might suit him, to General Nixon on the 26th November and the 9th December.

By the middle of December arrangements had been made for the Admiralty to send out six Thames steamboats, forty flat-bottomed boats, six motor lighters and twenty small barges; Egypt had agreed to provide ten river steamers, for the towage of which to Basra the Admiralty were to arrange, and the Government of India had found forty river steamers,† of which twenty-four were stern-wheelers, which appeared to be more or less suitable for the work. It thus appeared as if General Nixon's river transport difficulties might be overcome.

But as time passed and difficulties arose in every direction it became increasingly evident that such hopes were deceptive. The labour shortage in England prevented the fulfilment of

* See Volume I., Chapter VII, p. 143, footnote.

† This number included the ten selected in November and alluded to in Chapter XIV.

even the first promises regarding the dates of delivery of the craft under construction; the subsequent erection of part of them in Mesopotamia was delayed for several weeks owing to the non-receipt there of the erection plans and detailed list of package contents; and the first few vessels only reached Mesopotamia late in May 1916. The Admiralty encountered unexpected difficulties in getting craft conveyed to Mesopotamia and the marine authorities in India also had many obstacles to contend with. As a result the six Thames steamboats did not reach Mesopotamia till the latter end of May; and of the fifty river steamers from Egypt and India, three were burnt, seventeen sunk *en route*, and the remainder reached Mesopotamia at different dates during January, February, March and April 1916.* Similar mishaps and delays happened in the case of the tugs and barges coming from England and India.

At the beginning of December the transport craft available in Mesopotamia, exclusive of *mahailas*, amounted to 13 paddle steamers, 3 stern-wheelers, 9 tugs, 3 screw boats, and 47 barges; and during that month the only addition to these consisted of two barges. This flotilla gave the force in Mesopotamia an average daily delivery power upstream of only 175 tons for all services. Moreover all these vessels were in very bad condition owing to constant work and inadequate repair facilities, and the immediate outlook gave little hope of improvement in either respect.

Basra, though it possessed many natural disadvantages, was better suited for a base than any other locality; and its disembarkation facilities, crude as they were, had so far sufficed for the requirements of the force. General Nixon apparently considered that they would still suffice for his requirements once he had occupied Baghdad; and in this connection it must be remembered that he had only seen Basra under flood conditions, for, with his headquarters staff and his Inspector-General of Communications, he had been ever since the end of September 1915 at or above Kut, where they had been entirely occupied with the arrangements for the advance on Baghdad. Further, General Nixon was averse to heavy expenditure on the port unless it was shown to be imperative, and he considered it necessary to maintain secrecy about the coming reinforcements. These appear to have been the main reasons why advantage had not been taken of the subsidence of the floods in Basra after September 1915 to improve the port arrangements.

* Only five arrived in January, three in February, fourteen in March and seven in April.

General Gorringe, when ordered to Basra from Amara, was instructed to arrange for additional wharfage at Basra, where all ocean steamers had up till then to be unladen in midstream. This was done; and some ten days after his own arrival at Basra General Nixon issued orders for the construction of further wharves at Maqil, four miles upstream of Basra, where deep water existed along the river bank. Thanks to fine work by the Royal Engineers, five additional wharves,* alongside which ocean steamers could come and discharge direct on to the shore, were constructed here in the very short space of twelve days; and they proved to be of the greatest use. Owing to the difficulty of the land approaches to Maqil, to the disadvantages of dividing up and altering the base organisation† at such a critical period, and to the fact that Maqil itself was under water during the flood season, General Nixon decided not to make a more extensive use of this locality.

By the 6th December, the day that General Nixon reached Basra, a number of the reinforcing units had already arrived, and from then onwards they continued to come in almost daily. All efforts were concentrated on their despatch upstream as expeditiously as possible; and, as the extra wharves were completed and better arrangements began to work, the number of steamers it was possible to unload in the twenty-four hours was at least trebled. The arrangements for sending reinforcements upstream naturally depended on the order in which the units arrived and on the river transport available; but it was enunciated as a general principle that batteries of artillery should be given preference for river transport, as infantry, cavalry and pack transport were less likely to be delayed, when marching, by rain and floods. In point of fact, during December most of the infantry units went up by river, the journey from Basra to Amara taking about three and a half days, with a day longer to Ali Gharbi; by land, the same journeys involved ten and fourteen days' marching respectively.

In addition to sending troops to Amara and Ali Gharbi, General Nixon decided to send reinforcements to Nasiriya, in view of the reports of a Turkish advance down the Euphrates and of an Arab concentration there under Ajaimi. This

* These wharves were designed by Captain W. B. Huddleston, of the Royal Indian Marine, Principal Marine Transport Officer with the force, to rise and fall with the tide. This officer, with his staff, performed hard and useful service at this period in face of considerable difficulties.

† i.e., Having part at Basra and part at Maqil.

concentration, which was being carried out south of the Hilla area, was said to be largely due to promises of assistance by Turkish troops for an attack on the British.

On the 7th and 8th December General Aylmer, who had just arrived from India,* attended conferences on the general situation held by General Nixon, and on the 8th received his written instructions as commander of all British troops on the Tigris at and above Ezra's Tomb. In these instructions General Aylmer was informed that the main object of his operations was the defeat of the enemy on the Tigris line and the relief of General Townshend's force at Kut. For this purpose, the force at his disposal would, as far as was then known,† consist of the 7th Division (28th, 35th, and 19th or 21st Brigades),‡ the 3rd Division (7th, 8th and 9th Brigades), with Divisional Troops, Corps Artillery (1/1st and 1/2nd Sussex Batteries, with possibly further artillery when it arrived from France) and the cavalry and details at Ali Gharbi. General Aylmer was also told that General Townshend had been informed that the concentration of the relief force would be made on the line Shaikh Saad–Ali Gharbi; but, said General Aylmer's instructions, the extent to which this could be accomplished would depend on the military situation from day to day.

On the 12th December General Aylmer arrived at Amara to take up his command. At this time the information received showed that the force opposing General Townshend still consisted only of the four Turkish divisions which had fought at Ctesiphon; but a fresh division (52nd) was probably just arriving in the Baghdad area; and there was an unconfirmed report that a further division had reached Falluja (west of Baghdad, on the Euphrates).

On the 12th December the distribution of the British force in Mesopotamia, excluding the force in Kut, was as follows: At Ali Gharbi were thirteen squadrons of cavalry, four and three-quarter battalions of infantry and ten guns; at Amara four and a half battalions and six guns; on the line of communication between Amara and Basra one sapper company, one Pioneer battalion and four companies of infantry; at Nasiriya and on the Euphrates line one squadron of cavalry, three and a half battalions infantry and ten guns; in Arabistan

* Where he had held the post of Adjutant-General at Army Headquarters.

† Much of it had not yet arrived, and there was no exact knowledge then of when the different units would arrive.

‡ Only one of these brigades had been with the division in France.

three squadrons of cavalry and half a battalion of infantry; and at Basra, in addition to its garrison of three companies of infantry and two guns, there were a cavalry regiment and four guns under orders for Nasiriya, and a cavalry regiment, a sapper company and one and a half battalions of infantry under orders for Amara or beyond. In addition, there were at Bushire a squadron of cavalry, seven guns and two infantry battalions.

On the 11th General Aylmer had come to the conclusion that a detachment sent forward from Ali Gharbi to Shaikh Saad would not only be dangerously isolated, but would be of no assistance to General Townshend. He accordingly countermanded its despatch, informing General Townshend why he had done so. General Aylmer also telegraphed to General Nixon requesting that, as the offensive efficiency of his force would depend largely on the bridging facilities it possessed, India should be asked to despatch immediately all available pontoons, superstructure, etc.*

On the same day General Aylmer received a telegram from General Townshend reporting heavy Turkish attacks, expressing anxiety as to the adequacy of his ammunition and hoping for relief within ten or fifteen days.† In replying to this on the 12th December General Aylmer remarked that the amount of ammunition in Kut did not appear to him to explain General Townshend's urgent request for relief within a maximum of fifteen days; and he asked General Townshend to give full consideration to the difficulties of transporting quickly sufficient troops for his relief and to the great risk of attempting this relief with insufficient forces. He added that the longer General Townshend could hold out the greater would be the probability of successful relief operations.

In acknowledging this message next day, General Townshend said that his daily casualties would lessen his ammunition expenditure and he had been wrong to express anxiety about it; and he agreed with General Aylmer as to the danger of attempting his relief with any force less than a strong division. His great danger was lest the enemy in greatly superior numbers should make a determined assault, and, although he did not think the Turks would do it, the danger existed. His Indian regiments had suffered severe casualties, were very short of

* India up to this time had few pontoons and only limited arrangements for making more. Of fifty asked for in November 1915 only twenty-three had reached Basra by the middle of January 1916.

† He had expressed a similar hope on the 9th December in a telegram to General Nixon.

British officers, and the *moral* of some of them was not what it had been ; and he could not say that his troops were happy and confident. Moreover, there was a danger of his running short of gun ammunition, and he had had to demolish his boat bridge. General Aylmer also heard that day from Basra that the only available aeroplane was leaving there for Ali Gharbi, and that no more aeroplanes could be sent him for at least six weeks. Consequently air reconnaissances were only to be undertaken very sparingly until the relief operations actually started.

On the same day (13th December) General Aylmer sent instructions to General Younghusband that the relief force would concentrate at Ali Gharbi, and, while it was unlikely that the Turks would attack him there, General Younghusband must realise that General Aylmer did not wish the force at Ali Gharbi to be invested. Consequently if General Younghusband found his position seriously threatened he was to fall back towards Amara, delaying the hostile advance.

General Townshend, in a telegram of the 14th December to General Aylmer, said that, as the bulk of the enemy's force was on the left bank of the Tigris, and as it was on that bank only that he himself could co-operate with General Aylmer, he supposed the relief force would advance by the left bank.* Next day General Townshend reported that the Turkish cavalry brigade had passed to the south-east of Kut on the right bank of the Tigris, moving towards Es Sinn.

On the 15th December General Aylmer telegraphed his appreciation of the general position on the Tigris line to General Nixon, repeating it to General Townshend: The Turkish force round and below Kut on the Tigris, which it would be safe to estimate at 15,000 men and 54 guns, might be reinforced by one Turkish division, or 7,000 men with 9 guns, before the 1st January† and by another division (7,000 men with 24 guns)‡ before the relief force could advance. According to Intelligence reports two further Turkish divisions, totalling some 16,000 men with 44 guns, might also arrive at Kut between the 20th and 27th January.§

* General Townshend estimated the numbers of the Turkish force as 12,000, including 2,000 horsemen, of whom only about 1,500 were on the right bank. But he asked urgently for an aeroplane report of the enemy numbers in front of him.

† 52nd Division reached Kut before 24th December.

‡ This division, reported to have reached Falluja on the Euphrates, never materialised.

§ One of the divisions, i.e., the 2nd, did arrive eventually, but not till February.

General Townshend had probably sufficient rifle ammunition for at least six weeks, but his gun ammunition might only suffice for three or four weeks. His 7,800 effective rifles would be reduced, taking the daily average of casualties at seventy-five, by 1,200 on the 1st January and by 2,400 on the 15th January; there were the very serious facts of wastage in British officers and reported diminishing *moral* of Indian troops; and the coming Turkish reinforcements would add greatly to the strain upon the reduced Kut garrison. General Aylmer, therefore, came to the conclusion that, as it would be hazardous to rely on General Townshend holding out beyond the 15th January, he should attempt to relieve Kut by the 10th January if possible.

General Nixon was in the best position to estimate when the Tigris Corps could be concentrated at Ali Gharbi,* but General Aylmer estimated that he should have there by the 3rd January the whole of the 7th Division, the Cavalry Brigade, and possibly an extra infantry brigade, some artillery and other details; and that the assembly of the entire 3rd and 7th Divisions at Ali Gharbi ready to advance together would probably take three weeks longer.

While he would of course prefer to advance with his whole corps together, and while he realised that to advance with only part would further delay the concentration of the remainder† and would prejudice his chances of obtaining a decisive victory, General Aylmer realised that the essential point was to ensure General Townshend's timely relief. He was, therefore, strongly of opinion that whatever troops had concentrated at Ali Gharbi by the 3rd January—there should be at least one division and the cavalry brigade—should then advance to the relief of Kut in spite of all transport deficiencies; and he came to the conclusion, having regard to the effect that the presence of General Townshend's force at Kut should have on the Turkish advance and on their supply and transport arrangements, that a strong division and a cavalry brigade should be able to effect the relief.

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* General Aylmer had just heard from Basra that units of the 3rd and 7th Divisions were arriving piecemeal and in no regular order, and that it would be necessary to organise brigades as the units arrived at the Tigris front. It should be noted here that when these divisions started from France, it was understood there that they would stop for reorganisation in Egypt. Moreover, at Marseilles, steamers for them had to be taken as they arrived there, filled to their utmost capacity and despatched as quickly as possible. Some of these vessels had no accommodation for horses and vehicles and therefore some units had to embark incomplete.

† Owing to the amount of river transport which would have to accompany the advance.

General Aylmer asked that a decision might be come to before the 25th December to allow of his making the necessary arrangements.

On the 18th December General Nixon answered agreeing that General Aylmer should start his advance from Ali Gharbi on the 3rd January or as soon after as possible. He considered that it should be possible to concentrate at Ali Gharbi by that date a force of five brigades and forty-six guns with four gunboats.* This, with General Townshend's force, would give us about 23,000 combatants and 84 guns to deal with Turkish forces, which might possibly amount to 36,000 men and about 100 guns,† but would probably amount to 20,000 men and about 60 guns; and he considered that General Aylmer's force, *plus* that of General Townshend, would suffice to relieve Kut.

General Aylmer now asked General Nixon in a personal letter whether it was still the intention of H.M. Government that the Tigris force should, after the relief of Kut, push on and occupy Baghdad; and he asked for General Nixon's views on the forthcoming operations. In reply to this, General Nixon telegraphed on the 25th December that his intention was not to advance beyond Kut for the time being; and he followed up this telegram with a letter giving his views more fully. He said that his latest instructions were to capture and hold Baghdad, but that after relieving Kut he had no intention of advancing further until the remaining reinforcements had reached Mesopotamia and the 6th Division had been reorganised. He had asked for two more divisions to be sent him, but had been told that these could not be furnished for the time being. He mentioned the protection of the oilfields as an embarrassment which might require troops; and the augmentation of his river transport, expected to the number of some two hundred craft, would take time.

Reports received by General Aylmer from General Townshend from the 16th to the 19th December indicated an improvement in the situation at Kut. The enemy had shown general apathy, the British daily casualties were less, the defences of Kut were becoming quite efficient and a change for the better in the *moral* of the Indian troops was noticeable.

* General Nixon, however, concluded his telegram by saying that this must depend on the arrival of the reinforcements from overseas; two days later he heard from the India Office that the estimate of date of arrivals furnished by the Admiralty appeared to be too optimistic.

† This number included the Turkish 26th and 36th Divisions, both of which had been reported *en route* to Mesopotamia, but neither of which materialised.

But in answer to a request by General Aylmer for a rough estimate of requirements in men, animals and equipment to restore the efficiency of the 6th Division, General Townshend stated that, in view of its heavy losses, it would be unwise to rely on this division for an advance beyond Kut. In his opinion it should be placed on the line of communications to rest and reorganise. On the 19th December General Townshend said that there were not more than a thousand Turks all told on the right bank of the Tigris; and on the same day General Aylmer estimated that the enemy force covering Kut to the east at Shaikh Saad consisted of five hundred Arab cavalry, one thousand tribesmen and possibly three guns.*

On the 20th General Aylmer telegraphed to General Townshend saying that it seemed to him at that time improbable that the Turks would attempt to bar the advance of the relief force at Es Sinn, but it was possible; and if they did so they would presumably have to hold both banks of the river. In this case the enemy's force opposed to him would be weakened and this might enable General Townshend to send a considerable portion of his force across the river, thus affording Generals Aylmer and Townshend an opportunity of striking a decisive blow at the portion of the Turkish force on the right bank. General Townshend was instructed to consider fully the method of doing this and to telegraph his opinion, with a report of the rapidity with which he could cross, as well as the best place for crossing.

General Townshend had already told General Aylmer that there were none of the original bridging train pontoons or *danaks* left and that though he had some fifty *mahailas* he could not, for lack of material for superstructure, make them into a bridge. He could arrange to ferry troops over, and, if General Aylmer occupied the right bank of the river opposite him, there would be no difficulty. As it was, the enemy had installed guns west, south and east of his position and there was no covered place in which he could make a bridge or rafts. On the 22nd, in answering General Aylmer's telegram of the 20th, General Townshend, who had recently received a report sent to General Nixon from Tehran to the effect that von der Goltz meant to invade Persia with large Turkish

* Two days later two of the new gunboats, *Butterfly* and *Dragonfly*, reconnoitred upstream from Ali Gharbi to ascertain the truth about reports of a considerable Arab concentration near Shaikh Saad. They found two lines of trenches on the right bank of the river about four miles below Shaikh Saad and exchanged fire with them.

forces, said that he thought it most improbable that the Turks would oppose General Aylmer's advance, downstream of Kut. If the news about von der Goltz was true,* as General Townshend thought it was, then all that the British would have to oppose them in their advance towards Baghdad would be Nur-ud-Din and his 12,000 men. General Townshend thought that General Aylmer's force should advance by the left bank of the Tigris, as the bulk of the Turkish force was on that bank ; and after the destruction or defeat of Nur-ud-Din's force Baghdad would become their objective. General Townshend could easily cross his troops to the right bank when General Aylmer arrived there ; but it would be a slow business, as no preparations for it could be made beforehand owing to lack of cover for construction of rafts, etc. General Townshend then entered into the details of how he proposed to carry out the crossing, which would take twelve days. This seemed extraordinarily slow, he said, but he thought that by working night and day he could reduce it to six days. This would be all avoided if General Aylmer advanced by the left bank and brought a bridge with him.

On the 22nd December General Townshend reported his effective strength as 9,185, of whom 7,211 were infantry ; he also said that the Tigris had become so low as to be practically fordable opposite the south end of Kut town ; and he added that the Turks now possessed a pronounced increase in machine guns. On the 23rd he asked urgently, in view of the possible arrival of two fresh Turkish divisions, for an aerial reconnaissance ; and on the 24th and 25th he reported the course of the heavy Turkish attack, indicating the arrival of Turkish reinforcements and the receipt by them of more ammunition.

On the 26th and 27th December it appeared from General Townshend's reports and from an air reconnaissance that at least two of the Turkish divisions investing Kut had moved to a position some eight miles upstream ; and that part of them were on the right bank of the Tigris, having crossed by a boat bridge recently constructed at the southern end of the Shumran bend. General Townshend considered that this action was due to the repulse of the Turkish Christmas Eve attack and to the increasing concentration of British forces at Ali Gharbi. Although some Turks remained in the trenches to the northward of the Kut peninsula and opposite the fort, some of their guns had evidently been removed. They had

* For Goltz's real opinion as quoted from German sources, see pp. 174–5.

undoubtedly relaxed their investment and it was General Townshend's opinion that they were entrenching a new position astride the Tigris above Kut to defend against the advance of General Aylmer's force.

On the 28th General Aylmer asked General Townshend with how many of his infantry and guns of different classes he could co-operate with General Aylmer, in the event of the Turks awaiting the arrival of General Aylmer's force at or near Kut about the 10th January. To this General Townshend replied next day that he estimated he would have 5,000 rifles, 16 field guns and two naval 4·7-inch guns in horseboats fit to co-operate.

On the 28th December General Townshend reported that the Turkish force upstream were entrenching, but that at least a division, with much transport, had marched from the Turkish camp there and were then bivouacking some three miles north-east of the Kut fort. The next day he telegraphed that this division could no longer be seen and that other enemy troops had been seen moving downstream on the left bank. This looked, said General Townshend, as if the Turks were going to take up a position on the left bank of the river at Es Sinn. On the same day (29th) General Townshend expressed his anxiety regarding the possibility of the 36th Turkish Division* reinforcing the Turks by the 3rd January and he hoped that if General Aylmer started his advance that day he would reach Kut before the 10th January. The Turks for the last two nights had been firing heavily on Woolpress village and their trenches were getting close to it.

That same day (29th) General Aylmer telegraphed to General Nixon's headquarters (repeating the message to General Townshend) that, although he would make no definite plans till he reached Ali Gharbi, his intention was to send General Younghusband on to Shaikh Saad on or about the 3rd January with a force equivalent to a division and the cavalry brigade. General Younghusband would dispose of hostile forces reported at Shaikh Saad and his advance should also induce the enemy about Kut to disclose his intentions. The delayed arrival of a column coming to Amara from Basra with land transport would prevent the simultaneous advance of the whole force from Ali Gharbi on the 3rd; but General Aylmer hoped to join General Younghusband about the 8th January with the remainder of the force, when he would at once continue the

* The reports of the coming of this division proved to be incorrect.

advance. If, in the meantime, General Townshend's condition became very bad, General Younghusband at Shaikh Saad would be in a position to push on quickly to Kut.

General Aylmer followed up this telegram on the 30th December with the following, addressed to General Townshend and repeated to General Nixon's headquarters :—

"... You will readily realise that in drawing up an appreciation of our advance to relieve Kut it was necessary to give safe dates of arrival at Kut, allowing for opposition *en route*. Our relieving force can only be organised as it arrives at Ali Gharbi and dates of starting from there allowed for this. Those dates also depend on arrival of ships from Basra. There are objections to pushing forward troops prematurely from Ali Gharbi for your relief and using forced marches, but I am of course ready to take very great risks in this matter should your condition absolutely require it. For example, I could, in a very extreme case, start advance of a column from Ali Gharbi on January 1st. Such a column, if there was no opposition, could possibly reach Nukhailat on 3rd, and by sending troops after them on ships without stopping at Ali Gharbi, they might possibly amount to a division there on that date. I cannot, of course, say what enemy would do under such circumstances. We might have to fight them at Es Sinn position, and this seems probable . . . . but even in that case the pressure on you would be greatly relieved. If enemy did not stand between Nukhailat and Kut, such a column could join you at Kut on 4th. Remainder of Corps could not possibly reach Nukhailat till 8th, and Kut till 9th. I would greatly prefer to make a start from Ali Gharbi with one division on 3rd, as proposed in my telegram of 29th. In such a case, if your condition demanded it, one division could be at Nukhailat on 5th, and the rest of Corps on 8th. By far the best plan, however, from the point of view of relieving force, would be to advance all together from Shaikh Saad or its vicinity as a combined corps. Nukhailat could possibly be reached on 8th, though 9th would be a safer date. Such a plan, though slower, would be far more certain to gain its object. It is essential to postpone our actual methodical advance as long as possible, as hurry means inevitable want of organisation, and consequently decreased efficiency. You may, however, rest assured that everything possible

will be done to hurry relief to utmost if your circumstances really demand it. I know you will give full weight to such considerations before you give any definite date by which you must be relieved."

This telegram crossed two from General Townshend, in which he reported that his casualties since the beginning of the investment amounted to over 1,700 and that, owing to certain unsatisfactory incidents among his Indian troops, he was anxious for early relief.* He also mentioned that the Tigris was then at its lowest and that the bar at the mouth of the Shatt al Hai was only just covered with water.

On the 31st December General Nixon telegraphed saying that he entirely agreed with the views General Aylmer had expressed in his telegram of the 30th and that, unless General Townshend's situation imperatively demanded other action, General Nixon much preferred a methodical advance in force. General Townshend telegraphed his reply to the same telegram on the evening of the 1st January. It ran as follows:—

". . . . I am naturally with you in your intention and desire to unite the bulk of your force with your advanced guard at Shaikh Saad before finally moving forward *en bloc*. I will only appeal for immediate help from the advanced guard division under Younghusband in the direst necessity, which I do not think will arise now, because my adversary is clearly worried and anxious as to your advance now, and is turning his siege into a blockade investment during the last two or three days, confining his chief activity to shelling us at night with his big guns.

"An aeroplane passed over here in the forenoon, reported by look-out man. As I understand yours did not go out from Ali Gharbi, it would appear to be a hostile one."

The news regarding the hostile aeroplane was confirmed by General Aylmer's force. It was the first Turkish aeroplane seen by the British in Mesopotamia.†

Leaving Amara on the 31st December, General Aylmer with his staff reached Ali Gharbi on the 1st January. That night he decided that, unless the news from Kut was bad—

* The news conveyed in these telegrams added greatly to the anxiety already felt by General Aylmer lest Kut should fall before he could effect its relief.

† A few days later General Townshend heard from a Turkish deserter that four Turkish aeroplanes had arrived at Baghdad.

and it did not appear to him that the situation there had recently altered materially for the worse—General Younghusband should not advance on Shaikh Saad till the 4th January. The reason for this decision, which he communicated to Generals Nixon and Townshend, was that much work still remained to be done before the force advancing under General Younghusband could be considered to be properly organised.

The news regarding the enemy dispositions on that and the following three days was indefinite. On the 1st an aeroplane reconnaissance from Ali Gharbi reported an enemy force at Shaikh Saad, with detachments pushed five or six miles downstream, which had constructed entrenchments on both banks of the river. The whole enemy force there was roughly estimated at 2,000 Turkish cavalry, at least 600 infantry, and 1,000 Arabs. The next day General Townshend reported that no signs of the enemy could be seen at Es Sinn, and that he had come to the conclusion that the Turks had no force downstream of Kut. He had heard that a fresh Turkish division had reached Baghdad and he mentioned the arrival downstream of the *Firefly* in Turkish hands.* On the evening of the 3rd January, General Townshend telegraphed that large bodies of hostile troops, estimated at two divisions, were seen moving down the left bank from the enemy's camp upstream at 4.45 p.m.; and that this indicated a night attack upon him, for which he was preparing. Next day, however, he reported a quiet night and that the enemy movement reported the previous evening was inexplicable, unless it was a night march to Es Sinn. They could then see two bodies of Turkish infantry, one about two battalions and the other half a battalion, digging trenches a few miles eastward of Kut, roughly astride the direct road on the right bank of the river leading from Shaikh Saad.

On the 29th December General Nixon had sent General Aylmer his instructions for the forthcoming operations.† In these General Aylmer was told to begin his advance with all the available force at his disposal on or about the 3rd January. His primary object was to effect the relief of General Townshend's force at Kut, while his secondary object was to cover the concentration at Kut of further reinforce-

* General Townshend said that there was a very strong rumour among the Arabs that one of the two breechblocks of the *Firefly's* 4·7-inch gun had been left on board. This was found subsequently to be true, the breech-block being a spare one which had been kept below.

† Sent by hand of an officer.

ments, and to reorganise the forces there for further operations on the Tigris. No advance beyond the neighbourhood of Kut was to be attempted, but General Nixon wished to impose no limits on such tactical action as might be found necessary to effect the primary and secondary objects.

On the 3rd January, however, as the result of the latest information received from General Townshend in regard to arrival of enemy reinforcements and to the enemy dispositions, General Nixon telegraphed to General Aylmer modifying the above instructions. General Nixon's headquarters' estimate* of the Turkish forces downstream of Bughaila was :—

On right bank of Tigris nine miles west of Kut (36th and 45th Divisions).	11,500 rifles and 41 guns
On left bank of Tigris round Kut (38th, 51st and 52nd Divisions).	12,900 rifles and 24 guns.
On left bank of Tigris, possibly at Es Sinn (35th Division).	2,500 rifles and 18 guns.
On both banks of Tigris, near Shaikh Saad.	Four battalions of gendarmerie, 800 cavalry, 1,200 camelry.

The telegram went on to say that the numbers given were maxima, especially in regard to guns, of which the dispositions also were doubtful, but that of the six divisions mentioned all but the 36th had been, at one time or another, severely handled by us and their *moral* had probably diminished. General Nixon understood that the strength of General Aylmer's relieving force would amount to 1,500 sabres, 15,000 rifles and 46 guns, and it seemed unlikely that the enemy would give General Aylmer an opportunity of inflicting a decisive defeat on them downstream of Kut, but would probably concentrate their force west of Kut. In consequence, General Nixon considered that, after relieving General Townshend, General Aylmer should entrench in the most suitable position in the neighbourhood of Kut and await further reinforcements.

* It is known now that this estimate was excessive and, in many cases, incorrect both as to locations and numbers, but until the Turkish account of these operations has been published we shall probably not know exactly to what extent they were wrong. General Townshend, who telegraphed on the 5th, saying that he could not agree with this estimate, was more nearly correct in his figures, which he gave as 16,000 to 17,000 combatants and 32 guns.

Kiesling gives the Turkish numbers in the vicinity of Kut towards the latter half of December as about 20,000 effectives and 50 guns.

To this General Aylmer replied as follows, on the 4th :—

". . . . I feel bound to represent that in my opinion the enemy will not allow me to join Kut garrison without most serious struggle at some place below Kut, though of course it is quite possible enemy may take up a second position west of Kut if driven out of one east of it. On numbers given he can detach a force sufficient to keep Townshend secure in Kut and still engage my force in much superior numbers, say at Es Sinn position, on our nearer approach. Their supply difficulties doubtless delay their actual occupation of the position."

It is advisable at this stage, before stating the progress of the concentration of General Aylmer's force at Ali Gharbi on the 3rd January, to describe briefly some of the difficulties he had to contend with ; for the imperfect organisation of his force and its inadequate equipment had a considerable bearing on his subsequent operations.

He had no proper Corps staff. India had practically no staff officers to spare, the staff of the Indian Corps had not been sent with the two Indian divisions from France,* and a staff for General Aylmer had to be improvised hurriedly from any officers available in Mesopotamia. Consequently several of those appointed had insufficient or no training in staff work ; and some appointments could not at first be filled at all, while in others up to the end of January there were frequent changes.

The staff of the 7th Division had not yet reached Mesopotamia, and an extemporised staff had to be formed for General Younghusband's headquarters. Moreover, India had been unable to provide a staff for the division she was sending consisting of the 34th, 35th and 36th Infantry Brigades.† Consequently General Aylmer was forced to retain under Corps command certain formations and units additional to the 7th Division ;‡ and naturally this added to his own work, sufficiently complicated already by his lack of an experienced Corps staff.

Owing to the inadequate river transport, units had to be hurried up the Tigris as they arrived at Basra ; and this resulted in many units reaching their destination much in advance of their brigade staffs and in several cases without their full equipment. Moreover, it was very cold, all the

* General Nixon had said, when asked, that he would not require them.

† India had asked that owing to the great difficulty in finding staff officers, these brigades should be attached to existing divisions.

‡ See Appendix XIV.

steamers and barges had to be packed as closely as possible and the medical and supply arrangements were generally inadequate; consequently there was considerable sickness. The three brigades which for the time formed the 7th Division were all new to the division. The 28th, originally General Younghusband's brigade but now commanded by General Kemball,* from General Nixon's staff, had its full staff; and its three Indian battalions had been brigaded together in Egypt and elsewhere for a considerable period. It had suffered few casualties and was a very efficient formation. The 35th Brigade had been recently organised in India and was complete; but it had little training and experience as a brigade and had only been allotted to the 7th Division as a temporary measure. The 19th Brigade was an improvised formation, with a temporary brigadier and staff; and of its units the 1st Seaforth Highlanders was the only battalion which really belonged to it. The division had thus had no training or experience as a division and its commanders and staffs had not the previous experience of each other or their men which is desirable for serious offensive operations.

The units which had come from France had served through the long and arduous fighting there and had experienced heavy losses in officers and men. These casualties had been replaced by less experienced and efficient personnel, and, though their bravery left nothing to be desired, their experiences in the trenches of Flanders had engendered among them a more deliberate method of attack and fighting generally than was either necessary or desirable in Mesopotamia. Moreover, they had learnt to place great reliance on artillery co-operation in France, where the number and calibre of their supporting artillery had been greatly superior to any standard it was possible to provide in Mesopotamia. A further disadvantageous factor was the feeling among officers and men who came from France, firstly, of disappointment among some of them at having been transferred from the main theatre of operations to what they regarded as a "side-show," and among others, i.e., Indians,† at not being sent back to India after their strenuous fighting in France, and, secondly, of some contempt at what they deemed the lower class of fighting they were

* He had been relieved by Major-General A. W. Money, who, arriving at Basra on the 24th December, took up the appointment of Chief of the General Staff at General Headquarters in Mesopotamia.

† Another fact affecting some of the Indian troops was that part of the large increase of pay made to them while serving in France was discontinued after they left that country.

now called upon to undertake. This latter feeling, hardly concealed at first by some—though later considerably modified by their experiences and losses—led to a distinctly antagonistic attitude between what have been termed the "French and Mesopotamian schools," which, as unfortunate as it was unnecessary, might not have been noticeable had more experienced staff and other officers been present with all formations and units. Although it is necessary to refer to this state of affairs, too great prominence need not be attached to it, but at first it certainly affected to some extent the cohesion of General Aylmer's command.*

A further drawback was that many of the units had been trained on different lines. At this period of the war all units were largely composed of recruits and the further training they received after joining their units in the field differed in many respects in the different localities whence they had recently come, i.e., United Kingdom, France, Egypt and India.†

It is thus sufficiently clear that General Aylmer's force lacked, at this period, the standard of organisation and cohesion which is desirable for a body of troops undertaking an offensive in a difficult country against an entrenched and determined enemy, operations which would depend primarily upon combination and unity of effort.

Land transport, except for first line equipment, was almost totally lacking. This again was due mainly to the shortage of river transport, for though animals and carts were at Basra and could have been marched up by road, there was insufficient shipping to provide upstream the forage they would require; and local camels were difficult to get and when obtained so difficult to manage as to impair greatly their utility. In consequence, river craft had to be depended upon for practically all second line purposes; and this so restricted the mobility of General Aylmer's force as to give him little liberty of action away from the immediate neighbourhood of the river.

The river transport allotted to accompany General Aylmer's force in its advance consisted of nine steamers and tugs,

* Edmund Candler, official "Eye-witness" in Mesopotamia, refers to it in his book, "The Long Road to Baghdad"; and, as he says, there was injustice in both extremes.

† In India special training for frontier mountain warfare is a necessity. For the first eighteen months of the campaign in Mesopotamia there were several instances showing that some officers and men from India found at first some difficulty in adapting their frontier experiences to the modern methods of warfare employed by the Turks.

three launches and sixteen barges. As General Aylmer intended to take with him in his advance one month's supplies for his own as well as for General Townshend's force, his river shipping had to be supplemented by a number of *mahailas*.

His "Supply and Transport" personnel was at first less than a quarter of the establishment he should have had. This fact and the shortage of land and river transport rendered the issue to the troops of food and clothing a very difficult matter.

Reserve ammunition carried normally by the Divisional Ammunition Column had to be carried in river craft, from which extemporised brigade and battery ammunition columns carried the ammunition to units. The artillery was also handicapped in other respects. The amount of their ammunition in Mesopotamia and India necessitated strict economy in expenditure, and the supply of high-explosive shell for the field artillery from France was very scanty, as the War Office at that time could spare but little.* Aeroplanes were too few to allow of regular artillery observation work,† there were no proper anti-aircraft guns, the telephone equipment of batteries from India was old and inadequate, and many of the guns and howitzers themselves were of old pattern and out of date.

There was only one company of Sappers and Miners with the force at the outset, which, considering the nature of the country, was a great drawback.‡ The Bridging Train, which had material for, roughly speaking, two bridges each of about 350 yards length, consisted of a few pontoons and a number of *danaks*. Most of these *danaks* were old and often sunk when towed or in rough weather. Moreover, they were too heavy to be transported overland.

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* Major-General Sir Stanley von Donop, Master-General of the Ordnance at the War Office at this period, told the Mesopotamia Commission that in 1914 India was almost bled white of her surplus ordnance stores to assist the War Office; he expressed his acknowledgment of the ready way in which the Commander-in-Chief and the Director-General of Ordnance in India had assisted the War Office in every possible way, and he said that until March or April 1916 the War Office could do very little to help them. It was not, therefore, surprising that India found it impossible to provide the force in Mesopotamia with what was required. In 1915, and at the beginning of 1916, the War Office on several occasions were obliged to inform India that they could not spare what she asked for in the way of high-explosive shell and of heavy guns, howitzers, anti-aircraft guns, trench mortars, etc.

† At first there were only two available.

‡ Two others were required at the base and on the line of communications for work of primary importance.

Medical personnel and equipment were short and inadequate.* This was mainly due to the late arrival of the medical units from France. It is not, however, proposed to enter here into the details of the subject and it will be sufficient to state that, calculated on the pre-war Indian frontier scale, the medical personnel and equipment (including some improvised organisations) were only sufficient for roughly one-third of the force which began its advance from Ali Gharbi on the 4th January.†

Generals Nixon and Aylmer were both well aware of the deficiencies from which the relieving force suffered and General Aylmer represented these most strongly, while General Nixon took what steps he considered possible to remedy matters. But the most important requirements were additional river transport and further time in which to organise and equip the force properly; and all General Nixon's and General Aylmer's information led them to believe that it was imperative to relieve General Townshend without further delay. In consequence General Aylmer felt bound to advance in spite of all deficiencies in organisation and transport and had to accept the attendant risks. In this decision General Nixon expressed complete concurrence.

By the 3rd January the force concentrated at Ali Gharbi amounted to sixteen battalions of infantry, seventeen squadrons of cavalry and forty-two guns; and four further battalions were expected to arrive in the next two or three days. This force was organised in three bodies, i.e., the 6th Cavalry Brigade, the 7th Division, and a collection of various units under Corps command.‡

The Naval flotilla, under command of Captain W. Nunn, R.N., consisted of four newly constructed gunboats of the "Firefly" class—*Butterfly*, *Dragonfly*, *Cranefly* and *Gadfly*.

* Unfortunately, moreover, a large and important consignment of medical stores required by General Aylmer was left behind at Basra by a medical officer ordered to take it up with his unit. It was then sent up by *mahaila* convoy (through no fault of the Supply and Transport Corps) and arrived at the front weeks too late.

† During December 1915 news first began to reach Indian Army Headquarters from Mesopotamia of the hardships suffered by the wounded and of the insufficiency of medical arrangements at the front. This, following on the reports which Mr. Chamberlain told Lord Hardinge he had received to the same effect, led Lord Hardinge and Sir Beauchamp Duff to send a Commission of Enquiry to look into the matter on the spot. For this, Lord Chelmsford, then serving in India as a Territorial officer, and Surgeon-General MacNeece, the Director of Medical Services in India, were appointed; but Lord Chelmsford was designated as Viceroy to succeed Lord Hardinge, and General MacNeece went alone. General MacNeece's report was not considered satisfactory, and, after his return to India, the Commission known as the Vincent-Bingley Commission went to Mesopotamia. Their report showed an enquiry to be fully justified.

‡ For details see Appendix XIV.

In accordance with a request from General Aylmer, arrangements had been made to relieve him of all responsibility for the line of communication up to Ali Gharbi from the date his advance started.

Mention has already been made of the reports of a Turkish movement down the Euphrates and of General Nixon's decision to reinforce the garrison of Nasiriya, in order to protect the left flank of his main line of advance. At the beginning of December 1915 the garrison of Nasiriya consisted of a squadron of cavalry, the weak 12th Infantry Brigade (two and a half battalions), and ten guns (six mountain and four 15-pounder "post" guns); and General Nixon decided to make up the total of troops on the Euphrates line to the strength of a weak division of two infantry brigades* and certain divisional troops under General Gorringe, the commander of the 12th Division. For this purpose the 34th Infantry Brigade, the Home Counties Brigade, R.F.A. (less one battery) and the 12th Cavalry (less two squadrons), all of them part of the "Emergency Force" from India which arrived at Basra during December, were allotted to the Euphrates line.

The concentration of these units on the Euphrates line was in progress when, on the 28th December, General Nixon decided that, as the reported Turkish movement down the Euphrates did not seem to be materialising, a brigade group at Nasiriya would be sufficient once Kut had been re-occupied. This group was to consist of the 12th Infantry Brigade,† the 12th Cavalry (less two squadrons) and the guns already at Nasiriya, under the command of Brigadier-General Brooking, of the 12th Brigade. General Gorringe, with his staff, was to take up the command of a new division to be formed on the Tigris line, consisting of the 34th, 35th and 36th Brigades, with divisional troops. Accordingly, the movement of reinforcements towards Nasiriya was to be held in abeyance. The position of these reinforcements when this order was issued was as follows:—

At Nasiriya .. 1/5th Queen's.
1/2nd Sussex Battery, R.F.A.

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* The 33rd Infantry Brigade of the 12th Division was broken up early in December. Its staff was sent to join General Aylmer's Corps staff and its units were distributed.

† To comprise half battalion West Kents, 44th Infantry and 31st and 90th Punjabis.

At Akaika	..	12th Division Headquarters. 34th Infantry Brigade Headquarters. 31st Punjabis. 114th Mahrattas (less one company).
En route from Qurna to Akaika.	}	1/3rd Sussex Battery, R.F.A. One company, 112th Infantry.
At Qurna	..	Headquarters, Home Counties Brigade, R.F.A. 12th Cavalry (less two squadrons). One company, 114th Mahrattas. 112th Infantry (less one company). 12th Company, Sappers and Miners ;

and the units remained in these places till the 5th January, when General Gorringe received the following telegram from General Nixon :—

> ". . . . Corps, (i.e., General Aylmer), has wired to Army Commander that in view of large enemy forces reported by 6th Division to be moving down presumably to Es Sinn, movement should be made by you up Shatt al Hai to Shatra. Army Commander is against movement as far as Shatra owing to possible complications and your insufficient transport, but considers that one day's march by mixed force from Nasiriya up the Hai, backed up by widespread reports by you of further troops following, might have good effect. You should proceed in command. Please wire clear line when you can start, and with what force. If necessary for execution of this plan, you may continue movement of your remaining troops from Qurna westwards."

Next morning General Gorringe telegraphed that he was moving with his headquarters to Nasiriya and continuing the movement of troops there from Qurna ; and that on the 7th January he would move out along the Shatra (Shatrat al Muntafik) road and commence the formation of a depot of supplies.

In his advance on the 7th January to Butaniya, twelve miles northward of Nasiriya, with an advanced column of some 1,000 rifles and four mountain guns, General Gorringe encountered no opposition. In addition to spreading reports of an advance in force up the Hai, arrangements were made to create the impression that this was imminent by orders for the immediate construction of roads by local labour,

and for the collection of camels and supplies at Butaniya. Heavy rain on the night of the 8th/9th stopped the movement of more troops to Butaniya for a few days, but General Gorringe reported on the 9th January that many local Arab chiefs had come in to Butaniya camp to offer assistance, and that other tribes as far as Hai appeared anxious to come in for the same purpose.

By the evening of the 12th January the British force at Butaniya consisted of :—

12th Divisional Headquarters.

12th Infantry Brigade (less 500 rifles).
- 1/5th Queen's.
- 44th Infantry.
- 90th Punjabis.

34th Infantry Brigade.
- 2nd Royal West Kent Regiment (less half battalion).
- 114th Mahrattas.

12th Cavalry (less two squadrons).
1/2nd Sussex Battery, R.F.A. (four 15-pounders).
30th Mountain Battery (less one section).
Medical and administrative details.

On the morning of the 14th, General Gorringe, with an escort of two squadrons 12th Cavalry supported by the 1/5th Queen's and two guns of the 30th Mountain Battery, and accompanied by some friendly local Shaikhs, proceeded to reconnoitre personally the country between Butaniya and Suwaiq, six miles off along the road to Shatrat al Muntafik. Suwaiq was reached by General Gorringe and the cavalry at about 10.30 a.m. without incident, but its inhabitants warned General Gorringe of hostile Arab gatherings in the vicinity.

Shortly afterwards Arabs could be seen moving out of the neighbouring villages, and the Queen's and guns, just arriving on the scene, were ordered to take up a position about one mile south of Suwaiq to cover the withdrawal of the cavalry. At the same time a message was sent to Butaniya for the commander of the 34th Brigade to move out towards Suwaiq with two battalions and the remaining two mountain guns.

At about 11.15 a.m. the hostile Arabs opened fire and began to advance in gradually increasing numbers against General Gorringe's flanks and rear, these movements being assisted by the ground, which was much intersected by numerous deep irrigation cuts and covered with brushwood. The British retirement continued very steadily, however, and at

2.30 p.m., about four miles from Butaniya, the reinforcing column of the West Kents, 114th Mahrattas and two mountain guns met General Gorringe's force and took over rear guard duties; and the retirement continued. By 6 p.m., the Arab attack having died away, Butaniya was reached, with a total British casualty list of forty. The Arabs, who numbered about 3,000, are said to have suffered 200 casualties.

After this the British column remained in occupation of Butaniya until the 7th February, but no further advance to the north was carried out; and here we can leave this force for the present.

CHAPTER XX.

THE ACTION OF SHAIKH SAAD.

(SEE MAPS 13 AND 14.)

ON the 3rd January General Aylmer issued his written instructions for the next day's advance. General Younghusband, with the 6th Cavalry Brigade and the 7th Division, and accompanied by the gunboats *Butterfly*, *Cranefly* and *Dragonfly*, was to proceed as far as the neighbourhood of Shaikh Saad.* Beyond that he was not to go unless expressly ordered to do so by General Aylmer.

The enemy's total strength at and below Kut at that time was estimated to be 22,000 with 67 guns,† in addition to a mixed brigade of cavalry and camelry with two light guns and Maxims, assisted by at least 2,000 Arab irregulars. They were reported to have pushed below Kut an advanced force, of which 900 cavalry, 1,100 camelry, two light guns, some machine guns and possibly a battalion of infantry were entrenched astride the river at Shaikh Saad, the mounted troops being chiefly on the right bank. It was also possible that part of a Turkish division had come forward to Shaikh Saad, in which case the bulk of it would be on the left bank, as the Turks had no known means of crossing a large force over the Tigris below Kut.‡ If a portion of the Turkish force at Shaikh Saad could be captured, said General Aylmer, it would have an excellent moral effect.

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* 6th Cavalry Brigade .. "S" Battery, R.H.A. (four guns). 14th Hussars, 4th Cavalry and 33rd Cavalry.
7th Division .. .. 19th, 28th and 35th Infantry Brigades.
16th Cavalry (less two squadrons).
128th Pioneers.
13th Company, Sappers and Miners.
Bridging Train.
9th Brigade, R.F.A. (eighteen 18-pounders).
1/1st Sussex Battery, R.F.A. (four 15-pounders).
Heavy Artillery Brigade (72nd, 77th and one section 104th Batteries = 10 guns).
Medical and administrative units ;
giving General Younghusband an approximate combatant strength of 13,330 ; this included about 9,900 rifles, 1,340 sabres, 36 guns (exclusive of those in gunboats) and 52 machine guns.

Note.—Battalions which had come from France had each four machine guns. The remainder had still only two machine guns each.

The Divisional Signal Company had not yet arrived and improvised formations had to take its place.

† This was an over-estimate : see preceding chapter.

‡ They were known to have moved a few barges, the remains of the bridge of boats left on the right bank, downstream from Kut.

On arrival at Shaikh Saad, General Younghusband was to prepare immediately an aeroplane landing ground and to arrange for air reconnaissances to gain information on the following points : the situation and condition of the Suwaikiya, Ataba and Suwada marshes and of those on the right bank of the Tigris between Nukhailat and the extreme right of the position at Es Sinn ; whether on the left bank of the river the Turkish left extended to the Ataba marsh ; and whether the Turks had any bridge behind their position. It should be noted that the British, though they had traversed this area before (and had turned the Turks in September 1915 out of the Es Sinn position) had no accurate knowledge of its topography. Evaporation and percolation at one season and rapid flooding at another render the area subject to much periodical change. Furthermore, the existing maps of the locality contained many shortcomings and the paucity of troops available for escorts (vitally necessary in those regions) had much restricted our own surveyors' efforts to make these shortcomings good.

General Aylmer hoped to start himself from Ali Gharbi on the 6th January with such of the remaining units of the Tigris Corps as had arrived by then. It was estimated that these should total approximately two infantry brigades, one regiment of cavalry, a howitzer battery, four mountain guns and details.

On the 3rd General Younghusband issued his orders for an advance on the 4th up both banks of the river to a distance of nine miles upstream ; and the information given by him of the enemy was that their advanced detachment of some 2,500 troops and two guns was entrenching a position astride the river about three miles south-east of Shaikh Saad.* The British column on the right bank, under General Kemball, was to consist of one troop of cavalry, the 9th Field Artillery Brigade, half the 13th Sapper Company, the 28th Infantry Brigade, and the 128th Pioneers (less one company). The column on the left bank, under Brigadier-General G. B. H. Rice, was to consist of the 16th Cavalry, 1/1st Sussex Battery, R.F.A., the 35th Infantry Brigade and one company, 128th Pioneers ; and was to be followed at half a mile distance by the General Reserve, consisting of the 19th Infantry Brigade and the Heavy Artillery Brigade. The Cavalry Brigade was to operate on the left of General Kemball's column, clearing

* The Political Officer with General Aylmer had obtained information from Arabs that there were some 4,000 Turkish infantry on the left bank of the river with this detachment. But this required confirmation.

the country and threatening the flank and rear of hostile bodies.

Land transport was to march on either bank between the fighting troops and the river; and the river transport was to move abreast the columns on land, headed by the three gunboats. General Younghusband's headquarters were to be on board the *Julnar*.

On the morning of the 4th, a south-easterly gale caused considerable damage to the bridging train and delayed the start of General Younghusband's force until 10.45 a.m. But the only opposition encountered was from two squadrons of Turkish cavalry and some two or three hundred Arabs on the right bank of the river. The cavalry brigade drove these back without difficulty and the day's march was completed by 2.30 p.m.

Resuming his advance on the morning of the 5th, General Younghusband's force reached, at about 2.30 p.m., the eastern end of the Musandaq reach, where it camped. During the march small mounted bodies of the enemy on both banks had fallen back before the British advance.

On the 4th and 5th January, General Aylmer learnt from General Townshend that enemy columns were moving east, evidently to oppose General Aylmer, probably at Es Sinn; that General Townshend now assumed that the two large columns he had reported moving on the 3rd (see preceding chapter) had also gone downstream; and that the enemy camps upstream of Kut were either gone or much reduced. This was the first clear indication received by General Aylmer that his advance had obliged the Turks to weaken their hold on Kut and that they were moving large forces downstream to oppose him. In consequence of this news, General Aylmer telegraphed to General Younghusband* that at least 20,000† enemy had moved down the left bank from Kut during the last few days, including 8,000 moving that morning. General Aylmer did not think they could cross to the right bank except very slowly and in small numbers and he expected them to occupy the Es Sinn position, though it was quite possible that, in spite of what must be great transport difficulties, they might move further downstream.‡

* This telegram reached General Younghusband during his march on the 5th.

† An over-estimate.

‡ Kiesling says that Nur-ud-Din decided in Goltz's absence at Kermanshah to hold Kut with a small force and to detach the larger portion of his force to oppose General Aylmer's relieving column.

It was also in consequence of this news that General Aylmer telegraphed the same day to General Nixon suggesting the movement of General Gorringe's force up the Hai,* in the hope that it might cause the Turks to make a considerable detachment in the Hai direction.

Weather conditions on the 4th January had prevented air reconnaissance, but one took place from Ali Gharbi at midday on the 5th. From this it appeared that, some two and a half miles below Shaikh Saad, Turkish trenches extended for about 2,000 yards on either side of the river and that there was considerable enemy movement and entrenching in progress there, the enemy numbers being estimated at over 10,000, of whom about half were on the right bank. The full result of this reconnaissance was telegraphed to General Younghusband at 4 p.m.

General Younghusband explained during the afternoon of the 5th to his subordinate commanders that he intended next day to threaten the enemy's left while pushing forward his own left (i.e., General Kemball's column on the right bank) to drive back the Turkish right into the Shaikh Saad loop and hold it there until defeated. It was thought that the loss of Shaikh Saad would expose the Turkish trenches on the left bank to enfilade fire and thus render them untenable. For this purpose the advance next morning would commence at 8.30 a.m.; the order of march and distribution of the force would be as for the march of the 5th, except that the General Reserve would be farther back and the transport would move in rear; and General Younghusband's headquarters would be in Captain Nunn's flagship *Gadfly*.†

In the evening General Younghusband received the following telegram from General Aylmer (despatched at 6 p.m.) :—

> ". . . . Aerial reconnaissance seems to me to indicate that Turks have considerably more than a mere advanced guard at Shaikh Saad and neighbourhood. Total force seen amounts to 10,500 and this may be under the mark, as others may not have been seen. A force of 8,000 went downstream on left bank to-day from Kut, starting at daybreak. It is quite possible they may not have stopped at Es Sinn position, but may be pushed on to Shaikh Saad, reaching there to-morrow night ready to fall on you after

* Alluded to in Chapter XIX.

† These orders for the march were issued in a Divisional Order, which did not, however, contain any reference to operations, plans for which were explained verbally.

possibly an indecisive engagement. Owing to their lack of bridge, this would probably constitute a menace to your force on left bank. I do not wish to run risk of even modified check at Shaikh Saad. My orders, therefore, are that you should hold enemy to his position with sufficient vigour to make him show his hand until my arrival with remainder of Corps, which will arrive at your camp at eastern end of Musandaq reach to-morrow evening (6th). You must have your bridge ready either where you are or close at hand. I particularly require information of situation of any marshes which might interfere with our flanking movements. I shall send aerial reconnaissance again to-morrow morning to ascertain whether more hostile troops are advancing on Shaikh Saad from Kut and what enemy is doing at Shaikh Saad and result may possibly modify present orders. Please acknowledge."

General Aylmer also sent further wires asking General Younghusband to prepare an aeroplane landing place at his camp and to have camping places allotted for the remainder of the Corps.

On receipt of these telegrams, General Younghusband decided to make no change in the orders already issued to his troops,* considering that the task now allotted to him would be best carried out by adhering to those orders ; and at 7.45 p.m. he replied to General Aylmer as follows :—

". . . . I propose advancing at 8.30 a.m. to-morrow on both banks with the object of clearing up the situation and pinning the enemy to his position to this side of Shaikh Saad if he holds on. I will throw the bridge across at the most forward safe position. I can hear of no regular entrenchments, which looks to me as if enemy means falling back. If all goes well, I will push to Shaikh Saad and there await you. I can hear of only a few guns with the enemy, whereas we are strong in that arm. You cannot count on any marshes shown on the map at this season."

There was considerable sniping at the British camp during the night 5th/6th January, and a few casualties were suffered by the Cavalry Brigade.

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* As a result of these orders by General Younghusband, General Kemball, in his orders to his (right bank) column, had announced the intention next day as " 7th Division will advance on Shaikh Saad to-morrow. Right bank column will bivouac to-morrow at south end of bend immediately upstream from Shaikh Saad."

The advance on the morning of the 6th, delayed by a dense mist, started at 9 a.m. and was carried out in the following order :—Preceded by an advanced guard of one troop 16th Cavalry and the 37th Dogras and with the bulk of the 16th Cavalry as right flank guard, General Rice's column moved up the left bank, followed at one mile distance by the Reserve Column under Colonel Dennys.* On the right bank, the advanced guard consisted of one troop, 16th Cavalry, one section of the 9th Brigade, R.F.A., 56th Rifles, and a company of the 128th Pioneers. General Kemball's main body moved in two parallel columns ; the right one—moving along a track near the river bank—consisted of column headquarters, the 9th Field Artillery Brigade (less one section), 92nd Punjabis, one company 128th Pioneers, three field ambulance sections and all the wheeled first line transport of the column ; the left column consisted of half the 13th Sapper Company, the Brigade Machine Gun Company,† 2/Leicestershire, 51st Sikhs (less two companies)‡ and 53rd Sikhs. The 6th Cavalry Brigade moved two miles from the left or outer flank of the two infantry and artillery columns ; and one company 128th Pioneers remained behind in camp to prepare an aeroplane landing ground.

The mist lifted about 10 a.m., the advance on both banks having proceeded so far without incident. About half an hour later General Kemball's advanced guard reached the western end of the Musandaq reach, about two miles from where the enemy's trenches were reported, and soon afterwards drove off by fire some 1,000 Arabs to its front. At about 11 a.m., as the main body closed up to the advanced guard near the western end of the Musandaq reach, General Kemball made arrangements for his further advance. The 56th Rifles and 128th Pioneer company, advancing with their right on the river bank, were to engage the enemy and to push in their attack when that of the main body developed. This main body attack was to advance against what was understood to be the outer or right flank of the Turkish trench line, and the 53rd Sikhs, the leading battalion, was directed on this point,‖ the

* The 92nd Punjabis of the 19th Brigade had been ferried across the river early to reinforce the Right Bank Column.

† Recently formed with twelve machine guns, two guns having been withdrawn from certain battalions that were equipped with four machine guns each.

‡ These two companies formed escort to the second line transport, which moved well to the rear of the main body.

‖ The battalion was told to move with its right on the line of telegraph posts, which, according to aeroplane and other reports, led on to the enemy's extreme right.

Leicestershire being echeloned on their left with the 51st Sikhs half-battalion forming second line; and the half 13th Sapper Company and 92nd Punjabis, forming the reserve, were to follow the 51st Sikhs. The 9th Field Artillery Brigade, escorted by a company 128th Pioneers, were to cover the advance.

This advance began at about noon and soon came under heavy rifle and machine gun fire. To face this fire the 56th Rifles and 53rd Sikhs had to bring forward their right shoulders; and consequently before long the 56th were a considerable distance south of the river bank. A large gap had also occurred between them and the 53rd, as well as one between the 53rd and the Leicestershire. Moreover, it became increasingly apparent as the attack proceeded that the hostile trenches extended much further to the southward than had been reported, so that, instead of the main British attack outflanking the Turkish trenches, the left of the British attack was itself outflanked.

The advance of the 6th Cavalry Brigade on the left was much impeded by irrigation ditches; and when, in accordance with their orders, they attempted to swing forward to their right so as to co-operate with the infantry attack and to prevent the enemy's escape, a strong hostile mounted force, working round their left, forced them to stop and bring their guns into action. By about 1 p.m. they were in a position about four miles southward of Shaikh Saad facing north-west; and when they started moving further to their left they came under heavy fire from hostile trenches and were threatened with attacks on their left flank and rear by strong bodies of Arab horsemen. The British cavalry movement thus came to a standstill, continuing to be threatened by Arab attacks; but these were all kept at a distance by the fire of "S" Battery; and about 2 p.m. "S" Battery opened fire on hostile trenches 2,000 yards distant to the north-west.

On the left bank of the river, General Rice's column became engaged at about 11 a.m., when his advanced troops arrived within eight hundred yards of a strong line of trenches which appeared to extend from the river for about twelve hundred yards northwards.* The advanced battalion (37th Dogras) soon became heavily engaged under severe hostile gun and rifle fire, and well on their right the 16th Cavalry became engaged with two regiments of Turkish cavalry. By 3.30 p.m.

* The mirage prevented accurate location of the hostile trenches.

the whole of the 37th Dogras, supported by the fire of the 1/1st Sussex Battery and of the Heavy Artillery Brigade, had been absorbed into the firing line and were digging themselves in about eight hundred yards from the Turkish trenches; the 97th Infantry had moved up to their support and the 102nd Grenadiers had prolonged the 37th line to the right. The remaining battalion of the 35th Brigade (1/5th Buffs) was still in reserve, and about a quarter of a mile behind them were the three battalions of the 19th Brigade, i.e., the Reserve Column infantry.

By this time the front line of the 28th Brigade, supported by the fire of the 9th Brigade, R.F.A., had gradually approached the Turkish trenches on the right bank. The 56th, 128th company and 53rd were about three hundred yards distant from them; and on their left the Leicestershire, under enfilade fire and partly mixed up with the 51st who had moved up to their support, were some five hundred yards from the enemy trenches. General Kemball had still in hand as reserve the 92nd Punjabis and half the 13th Sapper Company. The Cavalry Brigade were still about four miles southward of Shaikh Saad and one and a half miles to the left of the 28th Brigade.

On both banks the infantry had suffered considerable casualties. In considering this action, the difficulties of fighting in this area must be borne in mind. The absolute flatness of the country with its featureless and colourless monotony rendered cavalry and infantry reconnaissance and maintenance of direction difficult in the extreme; well concealed trenches, such as the Turks were adepts at constructing, were imperceptible except at the closest ranges; and the constant mirage not only added to the difficulty of observation, but also, by the tricks it played, was often actually misleading.

At 3.45 p.m. General Kemball ordered up the 92nd Punjabis to advance on the left of the Leicestershire, but the movement had scarcely begun when orders were received from General Younghusband to cease the advance and to take up battle outposts for the night. General Younghusband had come to the conclusion that the Turks intended to make a determined resistance and that darkness would intervene before General Kemball's column could press its attack home and reap the benefit of success.* On the left bank the 35th Brigade had drawn considerable fire and was engaged against a strong force

* Sunset was about 5.10 p.m.

of infantry, whose reserves had evidently not yet come into action ; and General Younghusband did not consider it desirable to put more troops into the fight on this bank, as this would finally commit his force. Accordingly, at 3.50 p.m., he issued orders for the 28th and 35th Brigades to maintain their pressure on the enemy during the night by holding battle outposts, while the artillery and cavalry returned to camp to water and feed.

Before passing General Younghusband's orders on to his troops, General Kemball went forward personally and assured himself that there was no immediate chance of breaking through; but he thought it probable that the enemy would fall back in the night. He then issued orders for the taking up of a battle outpost line and for reorganisation of his force as soon as it became dark. The front line dug itself in as far as possible after dark under a heavy fire, which caused many casualties ; and one thousand yards in rear of it the 92nd Punjabis and half the 13th Sapper Company prepared and held a reserve position. The half battalion 51st Sikhs was withdrawn from among the Leicestershire and after reorganisation filled the gap between them and the 53rd Sikhs ; and parties from all units were sent back to bring up ammunition and water to the firing line. Rain and the incessant heavy fire from the hostile trenches made this a difficult task.

On the left bank, the attacking line of the 35th Brigade* took up a battle outpost line, also under heavy fire, and the 1/5th Buffs remained in reserve.

With reference to the various British estimates of the enemy's strength on the 6th January, the following information obtained from the Turkish General Staff is of interest. They say that on the 6th, excluding Arabs, the force opposing General Younghusband consisted of only the 35th Division (2,600 rifles), a cavalry brigade (400 strong), and a Camel Corps regiment. On the right bank their position, running for about 2,300 yards south from the Tigris, was held by the 105th Regiment (three battalions), while a trench facing south about a mile to their right rear was held by 240 men of the Camel Corps regiment. This latter detachment held off all attacks against their flank and rear ; and they offer the opinion that if this British turning movement had been carried out with resolution and vigour it would have effected a successful decision. In regard to this, however, it seems open to question whether they have allowed

* 37th Dogras, 102nd Grenadiers and 97th Infantry.

sufficiently for the effects of the action of the large numbers of Arabs assisting them on the right bank. Moreover, as shown subsequently, it seems clear that during the 6th some reinforcements from the 38th and 52nd Divisions arrived at the front and took part in the fighting that day.

The construction of a boat bridge had been commenced at 4 p.m. about half a mile east from the Hibsh bend and the transport concentrated there for the night, being covered on the left bank by Colonel Dennys' Reserve Column and on the right bank by the Cavalry Brigade. The boat bridge constructed on the 5th January at the camp at the eastern end of the Musandaq reach had been dismantled and formed into rafts for towing during the night of the 5th/6th ; but owing to the rough weather many of the country boats, of which it was formed, sank in the process and delayed matters. On the 6th, the convoy towing the rafts had started upstream at 9.30 a.m., but it was not till 3.30 p.m. that the hostile guns had been sufficiently silenced to allow of the rafts being brought up to commence the new bridge. A half company 13th Sappers worked at this throughout the night, but they were much hampered by rain and wind ; and the bridge was not finally completed till 1 p.m. on the 7th.

During the 6th the naval gunboats had attempted to support with their 4-inch guns the attack of General Kemball's column, but had been unable to afford much assistance.* In the afternoon they destroyed by rifle fire a Turkish mine floating down the river and after dark a second mine was sighted going downstream† ; in consequence the leading ships put out booms as a protection against other mines.

During the afternoon of the 6th January all attempts to get into communication with General Aylmer by wireless had failed, but it was established again by evening, and at 7.30 p.m. General Younghusband telegraphed a brief report of the day's operations to General Aylmer. General Younghusband said that he had attacked on the right bank while holding the enemy on the left bank ; but that, owing to delay by mist and inability of his weak cavalry brigade to drive away large bodies of Turkish and Arab cavalry, his right bank attack had been unable to turn the enemy's right and was held up. He then

* They were each armed with one 4-inch, one 12-pounder, one 6-pounder, one 2-pounder anti-aircraft pom-pom, and four Maxims. Their complement was two officers and about twenty men and they carried a wireless installation. Their engine power was not, however, great.

† Fortunately it failed to strike anything.

gave General Aylmer the position of his different formations, and said that he would continue the battle at daybreak. He suggested that, of the troops coming with General Aylmer, the 7th Lancers, the mountain and howitzer batteries and one infantry brigade should reinforce General Kemball's column and that the other brigade should reinforce the force on the left bank. He concluded by informing General Aylmer of the position of the boat bridge he was constructing.

General Aylmer, telegraphing from his camp at the eastern end of the Musandaq reach, replied at 10.40 p.m. He told General Younghusband that the 7th Lancers (less one troop) would leave at 7 a.m. next morning and join the 6th Cavalry Brigade and that the remainder of the force would start up both banks at 8 a.m. and advance to the bridge General Younghusband was constructing; where he himself would meet General Younghusband at 7.30 a.m. General Younghusband was not to commit his force to any serious attack before General Aylmer's arrival and was to telegraph at once his estimate of the enemy's numbers and dispositions.

To return now to General Aylmer's action at Ali Gharbi after the departure from there of General Younghusband's force. It has already been shown how fresh intelligence made it evident to General Aylmer that General Younghusband might meet with strong opposition; and this was confirmed by receipt, at 9.15 p.m. on the 5th, of intelligence from a reliable source sent by General Nixon that there had been at Shaikh Saad on the 29th December a force of 12,000 Turkish troops, 12 guns and 600 Arab horsemen.*

On the 4th January a British column, which had marched from Amara, consisting of the 6th Jats, 9th Bhopal Infantry, 41st Dogras, 7th Divisional Ammunition Column, transport and details, arrived at Ali Gharbi; and on the 5th the staffs of the 7th Division and of the 19th and 21st Brigades and the 2/Black Watch arrived there by river. The 61st Howitzer Battery and the 62nd Punjabis had also been expected to reach Ali Gharbi before the 6th, but they did not do so, being delayed in transit up the river.

On the 6th January, General Aylmer advanced from Ali Gharbi with the units so far arrived, marching along both banks of the river as far as the eastern end of the Musandaq reach, a

* According to the information given by the Turkish General Staff mentioned above, this information was incorrect.

distance of some eighteen miles.* The force consisted of the 7th Lancers, two sections of the 23rd Mountain Battery, the 21st Infantry Brigade† and an improvised 9th Infantry Brigade.‡ The river flotilla included five steamers and tugs,‖ a part of the bridging train and a *mahaila* convoy, which was escorted by the Provisional Battalion, formed of drafts for units in Kut. A troop 16th Cavalry, half the 67th Punjabis and a 15-pounder post gun of the Volunteer Artillery Battery were left to garrison the post at Ali Gharbi.

On General Aylmer's arrival at the eastern end of the Musandaq reach, he received the report of an aeroplane reconnaissance carried out that day as far as Es Sinn. Es Sinn position was empty and the Turks had no bridge below there. There were no large columns between Es Sinn and Shaikh Saad, but four bodies of the enemy estimated at a total of 3,000 had been seen between these places on the left bank of the river within six or seven miles of Shaikh Saad. The camps and numbers seen at Shaikh Saad were as had been reported on the 5th; and the enemy's position was three miles south-east of that place. The trenches on the left bank, extending for about one and a half miles northward from the river with their left flank turned back, were in four lengths, each with communication trenches leading to a short support trench; and there was a short second line trench half a mile in rear.§ Gun pits for six guns were also observed on this bank. On the right bank the trenches were in two lines along irrigation cuts extending for about a mile and a half southward from the river. On this bank no gun pits had been observed.

This report did not account for the column of 8,000 Turkish troops seen by General Townshend marching down the left bank on the 5th, and General Aylmer suspected that it had turned northward from the Tigris so as to take up a position whence it could strike at the right flank of his own force.

A warning having been issued previously, General Aylmer issued orders at midnight on the 6th/7th January for the

* General Aylmer was convinced of the necessity for the earliest possible junction with General Younghusband.

† 2/Black Watch, 6th Jats, 9th Bhopal Infantry, and 41st Dogras, under Brig.-General C. E. Norie.

‡ 1/4th Hampshire (less one company) and 107th Pioneers, under Brig.-General W. J. St. J. Harvey.

‖ General Aylmer's headquarters were on the *Mejidieh*, which was equipped with the main wireless installation.

§ It is difficult to reconcile this report with the trenches reported by the infantry on the 6th. It seems likely that during the 6th, the night 6th/7th, and the 7th, the Turks did a great deal of entrenching.

advance of the troops with him. The 7th Lancers, less a small detachment, were to leave at 7 a.m. to join the 6th Cavalry Brigade and the remainder of the troops were to start along both banks at 8 a.m. to reinforce the 7th Division ; one section of the 23rd Mountain Battery and the 21st Brigade were to move along the left bank, and one section 23rd Mountain Battery, the weak 9th Brigade and the Provisional Battalion were to march on the right bank.

At 1.20 a.m. General Aylmer received General Younghusband's reply to his request for an estimate of the enemy's numbers and dispositions. General Younghusband was unable to estimate the enemy's numbers, or to report his dispositions, but the enemy trenches were evidently held by strong forces on both banks ; and eight hostile guns had been disclosed. There were, according to the Cavalry Brigade, some 2,000 Turkish cavalry and 1,500 mounted Arabs on the right bank and strong bodies of enemy infantry had been seen at dusk leaving Shaikh Saad in a southerly direction.

General Aylmer rode forward on the morning of the 7th and met General Younghusband at 7.30 a.m. about half a mile below the bridge.* There was then a considerable mist everywhere, which did not clear for about two hours. On the left bank the 35th Brigade was closely engaged with the enemy, only one battalion (1/5th Buffs) being left in reserve ; the 16th Cavalry was out in observation guarding the right flank ; and the reserve brigade, from which half a battalion had been sent to reinforce the 35th Brigade, was formed up about half a mile north of the bridge. The bridge and the reserve column were both well within range of the enemy's shells. On the right bank, General Kemball's force was in close contact with the enemy, the 92nd Punjabis and the half 13th Sapper Company being in reserve ; and the Cavalry Brigade were operating to General Kemball's left. It appeared to General Aylmer that the whole of the 7th Division was so far committed as to leave him little liberty of action, and that the dispositions on the left bank were such as to afford the Turks a favourable opportunity for surrounding the 35th and Reserve Brigades. This opinion was strengthened by the suspicion that the Turkish division seen by General Townshend on the 5th, and still unaccounted for, would be used to outflank him by the north ; and an aeroplane reconnaissance was at once ordered by General Aylmer to try and clear up this point.

* General Aylmer learnt from General Younghusband that the force had sustained about 600 casualties in the previous day's fighting.

In discussing the situation with General Aylmer, General Younghusband was strongly in favour of only holding the larger Turkish force on the left bank without pressing the attack there, and of concentrating against the smaller Turkish force on the right bank with a view to crushing it and then enfilading the Turkish trenches across the river on the left bank. His knowledge at that time of the Turkish trenches and dispositions was, however, rather vague; and General Aylmer considered such a plan to be tactically unsound. Though he considered a success against the Turks on the right bank was probable, he felt that he ran too great a risk of being so strongly counter-attacked by the Turks on the left bank that his force there might be crushed and he might even lose his river transport.

General Younghusband was also anxious for a postponement of the attack on the left bank so as to allow him longer time to ascertain more of the enemy's dispositions, arrange his own plans, and, incidentally, make the acquaintance of the commanders of the formations which were about to come under his orders. General Aylmer decided, however, that it was undesirable to delay the attack. Delay would necessitate postponement till next morning, which would give the Turks time to strengthen their defences and to bring up reinforcements, whereas all General Aylmer's own available forces would be present by noon. Further, if he had postponed the attack, it would have been necessary for him to throw out forces some miles northward of the river to secure his position,* as the Turkish dispositions appeared to indicate a clear intention on their part of taking every opportunity of encircling his forces on the left bank, and this, if even only partially successful, would greatly add to his difficulties next day.

At 8.30 a.m. General Aylmer learnt from a message† found

* It would have been very difficult to send water out to troops posted there.

† The message was sent by Hamdi, Column Commander, to the Turkish cavalry commander, who had left Shaikh Saad with his brigade going in a south-westerly direction at 4 p.m. on the 6th. Judging by information given by the Turkish General Staff, the Turkish cavalry commander on this bank had only Arab or Kurd irregulars under him.

The text of the message (translated) is as follows :—

" To the Cavalry Commander :—

1. The 40th Regiment (52nd Division) and the 1/112th (38th Division) have been fighting this evening. Forty wounded. By order of the Commander another regiment has been ordered to send part of the regiment to the firing line, keeping the remainder in reserve. We will keep you informed as to our plans.

2. The flank of the 105th Regiment (35th Division) is sorely pressed.

3. The followers (?) of the 40th Regiment have been wounded, but we are in sight of a complete victory.

4. According to information received from the Commander, we are in great need of ammunition.

* * * *

Column Commander, HAMDI.

on an Arab despatch rider, who had been captured on the right bank during the night by the Cavalry Brigade, that infantry units from the 35th, 38th and 52nd Turkish Divisions were among those fighting on the right bank and that some of the Turks on this bank were in great need of ammunition. It was also ascertained from this Arab that the Turkish cavalry brigade and 600 camelry were also on the right bank; that 2,000 Arab tribesmen under Mahomed Pasha had operated against the left of the British cavalry brigade on the previous day; that two battalions of Turkish infantry had garrisoned the trench to the north-west of the British cavalry brigade; and that there were five Turkish guns on the right bank.* Shortly afterwards General Aylmer received a report that two hostile battalions preceded by four squadrons of cavalry appeared to be working round the right of the 35th Brigade at a distance of two or three miles. He also personally observed this movement.

The Turkish General Staff say that by the 7th January they had pushed up reinforcements to their Shaikh Saad positions consisting of the 52nd Division and the remnant of the 38th Division, bringing their total number of effective rifles present to about 9,000. From the message found on the despatch rider it is clear, however, that some of these reinforcements reached the position, and had been engaged there, on the evening of the 6th. Some of the information given by the Arab may have been incorrect, as it certainly does not agree, especially in regard to the positions of their cavalry, with that of the Turkish General Staff. The same authority says that they used the 37th and 43rd Regiments of the 52nd Division against the British right in counter-attacks.

General Aylmer decided to attack with the maximum available strength on the left bank and issued his orders accordingly just after 10 a.m. A change was to be made in the commands. General Younghusband was now to take command of the attack on the left bank, while that on the right bank was to be under General Kemball, both officers reporting direct to General Aylmer. The 16th Cavalry, the 9th Brigade, R.F.A.† (less one battery), the 72nd Heavy Battery, the 1/1st Sussex Battery, the 35th, 19th‡ and 21st Infantry Brigades, and three companies 128th Pioneers were placed at the disposal of General

* The Arab could give no information at all about the Turkish dispositions on the left bank.

† These were to cross from the right bank.

‡ Less 92nd Punjabis

Younghusband for the attack on the left bank. Of these, the 19th and 21st Brigades were to be employed by General Younghusband in turning the enemy's left flank in conjunction with a frontal attack by the 35th Brigade.

On the right bank General Kemball was to have at his disposal the 28th Infantry Brigade,* 92nd Punjabis, one company 128th Pioneers, one battery of the 9th Field Artillery Brigade, and the four guns of the 23rd Mountain Battery; and he was to attack with vigour as soon as General Younghusband was in position to deliver his turning attack. For this purpose General Younghusband was to keep Generals Aylmer and Kemball informed of his progress.

As a reserve in his own hands, General Aylmer retained, near the bridge, the Heavy Artillery Brigade (less 72nd Battery), the 13th Sapper Company, and the 9th Infantry Brigade. This brigade, which had hitherto consisted of the 1/4th Hampshire (less one company) and the 107th Pioneers, was now strengthened by the Provisional Battalion and by the 62nd Punjabis, who arrived from Basra by steamer about noon.

General Younghusband issued his orders for the attack on the left bank at 11 a.m. :—

> " . . . attack will commence at noon with a turning movement made by 16th Cavalry and 19th Brigade (less half 28th Punjabis and 92nd Punjabis).† The 19th Brigade will advance on the present right of the 35th Brigade, sweeping round to roll up enemy's left flank. As the attack progresses, 35th Brigade will co-operate, attacking with their left on river bank. 16th Cavalry will cover right flank of attack. Batteries R.F.A. under C.R.A. will be in position to cover advance from the vicinity of the present position.‡ 21st Brigade will follow as reserve in the centre. Reports to *Gadfly*."

On receiving his orders, Colonel Dennys, the commander of the 19th Brigade—which was then formed up about half a mile north of the bridge—at once rode forward and made a personal reconnaissance, which seemed to him to show that his orders as to direction would bring his brigade under enfilade fire from Turkish trenches thrown forward on the Turkish left flank. He returned and reported this, in the absence of

* The half battalion, 51st Sikhs, which had been escort to the transport, was sent to rejoin the 28th Brigade.

† Half the 28th Punjabis had been despatched during the night to reinforce the 35th Brigade and the 92nd Punjabis were still with General Kemball.

‡ Presumably meant present position of 1/1st Sussex Battery, i.e., about a mile north-west of the bridge.

General Younghusband, to a divisional staff officer, but was told that the trench he had seen was one reported the previous day by the 16th Cavalry, and that it was a second line trench and some two miles away from the Turkish left flank. In point of fact Colonel Dennys was correct, but from the available evidence it seems likely that this trench had been constructed by the Turks during the night 6th/7th.

Colonel Dennys then returned to his brigade, which moved off at about 11.45 a.m. in a north-westerly direction, leaving one company 28th Punjabis to guard the transport. The advance was made in two lines, the 1/Seaforth Highlanders on the left and the 125th Rifles on the right, while the 28th Punjabis' company covered the right flank; and the brigaded machine guns marched on the right of the second line. The Seaforths had orders to find the right of the 35th Brigade* and to swing round facing westwards when in rear of it.

About 1.30 p.m., after the brigade had advanced some three miles in a north-north-westerly direction, a divisional staff officer rode up and told Colonel Dennys that he had moved too far to the north and that, to correct this, he should move direct to his left for about 1,000 yards and then, after fronting, his men should bring up their right shoulders and form for attack facing westwards. The 21st Brigade under General Norie, which had been following the 19th Brigade at some little distance, had, in the meantime, received orders from the same divisional staff officer to send two battalions westward to fill the gap between the 35th and 19th Brigades. In accordance with these orders, General Norie sent forward the 2/Black Watch and the 6th Jats.

The movement to its left (i.e., south-westwards) of the 19th Brigade had not progressed far when parts of its lines encountered a very heavy enemy cross-fire from the west and north-west, and this brought many of the men round to face what were evidently hostile trenches in those directions about eight hundred yards distant. Although there were no signs of hesitation among the men, this check to parts of the line caused intermingling of the ranks of the Seaforths and 125th and consequently some temporary confusion as they engaged the enemy.

Between 2 and 2.30 p.m., when the whole of the second line of the 19th Brigade had been absorbed into the firing line, an enemy counter-attack was seen advancing against the right

* The mirage made this difficult.

flank of the brigade. The Turkish force seen to the northward was in three widely separated bodies, of which the leading two, composed apparently of cavalry, were moving eastwards under observation by the 16th Cavalry. The third body, composed of cavalry and infantry, proceeded to develop an attack against the 19th Brigade flank. To meet this attack Colonel Dennys pushed out to the right his brigaded machine guns and a company of the 125th ; and General Norie (21st Brigade) sent forward, first the 41st Dogras to the right rear of the 19th Brigade and then the 9th Bhopal Infantry to prolong the Dogra firing line—which was facing north—to the right. Assistance was also given by the 19th and 20th Batteries of the 9th Field Artillery Brigade, which had crossed the river just before 1 p.m.* and had only been a very short time in action. This combined action brought the Turkish counter-attack to a complete standstill within about six hundred yards of the 41st Dogras.

Meanwhile, the remainder of the 125th, Seaforths, 6th Jats, Black Watch and the 35th Brigade (in this order from the right) were pressing forward gradually and with great gallantry in a westerly or north-westerly direction against the well defended Turkish line. The Turkish trenches were well sited ; their rifle and machine gun fire was heavy, accurate and well controlled† ; and their artillery fire—apparently from two batteries, one near the river and the other about a mile northward—was particularly accurate. Moreover, the sun was right in the eyes of the attacking force and, with the mirage, added greatly to the British difficulties and especially to those of the supporting artillery,‡ which were unable to locate at all accurately the position of the Turkish trenches. About 4 p.m. the heavy artillery from the General Reserve also came into action to support the attack, the section 104th Heavy Battery firing from near the river bank and the 77th Heavy Battery being sent up in support of the 21st Infantry Brigade. Generally speaking, however, owing to the mirage and the sun the British artillery fire on the left bank had not the effect which had been expected.

By dusk the British line had advanced to within three or four hundred yards of the Turkish trenches and was then

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* They crossed the bridge before it was completed.

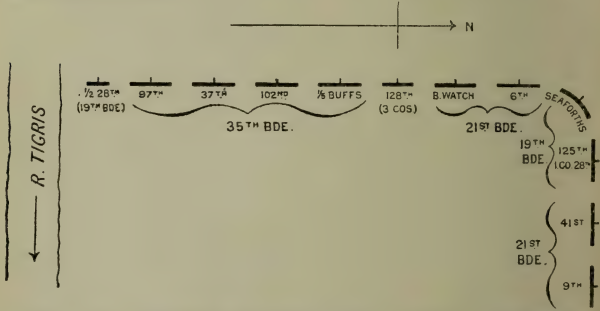
† " Troops who had been through Loos and Givenchy described it as equa to any rifle fire they had come under on the Western Front."—Edmund Candler, in " The Long Road to Baghdad."

‡ 1/1st Sussex Battery, 72nd Heavy Battery.

finally checked. Small parties or individuals had in places got to within a hundred yards, but only to become casualties; and a company of the Seaforths (under Captain F. Anderson), which had become separated from the rest of the battalion, reached a point forty yards from the Turkish trenches, only, however, to discover that they had advanced beyond support and that they had to wait till dark before the remnant (under Lieutenant Stewart) could withdraw to the general line.

The British and Indian battalions had displayed the utmost gallantry,* and they had suffered very heavily. The Black Watch and 6th Jats had each incurred nearly 400 casualties, including their commanding officers (Lieutenant-Colonel A. G. Wauchope and Captain R. C. Ross); while the Seaforths and 125th Rifles had each lost about 300 men, including the Seaforths' commanding officer (Lieutenant-Colonel W. M. Thomson).

When night fell, the rain came down hard and a bitter wind sprang up; the whole line was withdrawn a short distance, units were reorganised and they dug themselves in, being in the following order † :—



During the night the wounded were collected and taken in to camp; and water, food, ammunition and hand grenades were sent up to the front line. These duties proved a most difficult task owing to lack of landmarks to guide parties,

* "An heroic instance of the devotion of the Indian was witnessed by the forward batch of Seaforths. An officer of the 28th Punjabis had fallen close to the Turkish trenches, when two sepoys of his regiment were seen to crawl up and build round him a parapet of earth. They saved their Sahib, but at the sacrifice of their own lives."—Candler, "The Long Road to Baghdad."

† The half battalion, 128th Pioneers, after completion of the bridge at 1 p.m., had been pushed up into the fight, where it joined its company on the right of the 35th Brigade.

the mud and the continuous hostile fire; but the patient endurance and gallantry displayed in their performance by the men of the transport and medical corps, and by *bhistis* and followers of every description, was, according to General Younghusband's report, beyond praise.

Early in the afternoon* General Aylmer had placed the headquarters of the 9th Infantry Brigade with the 1/4th Hampshire and 107th Pioneers, from the General Reserve, at General Younghusband's disposal; but though they were pushed up about three miles northward from the bridge they had not been put into the fight; and just before dark they were again withdrawn to the camp.

On the right bank of the river, the British attack had met with more success. At about 1.30 p.m. the Cavalry Brigade moved up near the left of the 28th Brigade, coming under fire from Turkish trenches. Finding apparently that these trenches hampered their further operations in this area, the Cavalry Brigade moved off about 2.30 p.m. to a position about four miles southward of Shaikh Saad. From here the guns of "S" Battery, R.H.A., forced some enemy advancing from Shaikh Saad to retire again; and throughout the afternoon large bodies of mounted Arabs, which threatened the left flank of the Cavalry Brigade, were kept at a distance without much difficulty by machine gun fire.

The 28th Brigade advanced from their trenches to commence the attack about 2 p.m., as the sound of heavy firing from the left bank reached them. As on the previous day, the 56th Rifles and a company 128th Pioneers were on the right, with the 53rd and 51st Sikhs (less one company) prolonging the line; and the Leicestershire on the extreme left.

As the attack developed, the front of the firing line extended necessarily rather widely to the left and this limited the power of the single field battery available (28th Battery) to support the advance; but its fire, directed by a forward observing officer among the infantry, was very effective, while the four guns of the 23rd Mountain Battery, with their guns dug in, fired at 2,500 yards' range and kept down the fire of the Turkish trenches flanking the advance. The Turkish artillery which replied could not be engaged,† but had little effect on the British artillery.

* By this time General Aylmer had learnt from an aerial reconnaissance that, in addition to holding the trenches on either side of the river, the Turks had a force echeloned to their left rear about five miles from the river. This force was estimated to be 3,000 strong.

† The records do not say whether they were out of range or could not be located.

The Turkish rifle and machine gun fire was well sustained and the gallant British and Indian infantry managed at first to gain but little ground.

According to the orders issued to the brigade at 1 p.m., a general assault was to be made as soon as the 92nd Punjabis came up from the reserve on the left of the line. About 3 p.m. the 92nd commenced their advance and pushing forward in rushes reached the left of the line. But the hostile fire still prevented an assault and General Kemball brought up his last reserves, a company of the 51st Sikhs and the half 13th Sapper Company. He was on the point of pushing them in to give the firing line the necessary impetus, when at about 4 p.m. the Leicestershire, and then the 51st, 53rd and 92nd, rose and, with a fine assault over the last three hundred yards, carried the Turkish front line of trenches.* A second line of trenches not far behind was quickly occupied, practically without opposition, and four hundred yards beyond this, two mountain guns abandoned by the Turks were captured and brought in. Over 300 Turkish dead were found and three machine guns with much ammunition and equipment, as well as some 600 prisoners, were captured. But further advance was for the time being found to be impossible owing to the stout resistance from hostile trenches to the front and flank.† The whole of the right bank of the river for some miles eastward and southward of Shaikh Saad was honeycombed by irrigation cuts and these afforded the Turks a series of excellent positions from which they could confront and outflank the British attack. Unable to progress farther for the time being, General Kemball's infantry consolidated the position gained and the guns were brought up into close support. Here they remained for the night.

The gallantry of the British and Indian infantry on this bank also had been very great and they had been well supported by their artillery ; but their losses also had been heavy. During the two days' fighting, the Leicestershire had incurred over 300 casualties, and each of the three Indian Frontier Force battalions (51st, 53rd and 56th) had lost over 200 officers and men.

At nightfall the cavalry on both banks withdrew and with

* Some of the 51st Sikhs were the first to reach the Turkish trenches. Three company-sergeants-major of the Leicestershire Regiment were granted posthumous commissions (they were killed a week later) for their conspicuous gallantry in this assault.

† The Cavalry Brigade, who were not under General Kemball's orders, were out of touch engaged with Turkish cavalry and Arabs on their flank and were unable to close in to co-operate.

the half 13th Sapper Company and the Provisional Battalion provided protection for the camp and bridge on the right bank during the night. On the left bank, near the river and about a mile below the bridge, were the 16th Cavalry, 72nd Heavy Battery and the 9th Infantry Brigade.*

At 9.30 p.m. General Aylmer issued orders for the whole force to continue the attack next morning. In his telegraphic reports, sent earlier in the afternoon and at that time to General Nixon describing the situation, he expressed the opinion that General Kemball's success would enable the enemy's trenches on the left bank near the river to be enfiladed, and he hoped to carry them next day. He told General Nixon that it seemed that he had the whole Turkish force against him,† except possibly some 5,000 to 6,000 before General Townshend.‡

Turkish columns of infantry and cavalry, estimated at possibly two cavalry regiments and three battalions of infantry, seen during the afternoon and evening northward of the river were believed by General Aylmer to be beyond his right flank; and as they might attempt during the night to make for the river on his right rear he took steps to counter such a movement. For this purpose he ordered General Harvey, with the 16th Cavalry, the 72nd Heavy Battery, and the two and three-quarter battalions of the 9th Infantry Brigade on the left bank to march downstream early next morning.

General Harvey's detachment moved off well before daylight,‖ but halted at 6.45 a.m., after marching some six or seven miles, no sign of the enemy having been seen. Two gunboats were then sent to patrol downstream and at 7.45 a.m. General Harvey was ordered to withdraw his force to the vicinity of the bridge, the 16th Cavalry being despatched to reconnoitre the right flank to the north-eastward.§ At 10.45 a.m., owing to a report from the 19th Brigade that an enemy brigade was moving steadily to the east some miles north of the river,

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* 1/4th Hampshire, 62nd Punjabis and 107th Pioneers.

† It was estimated that the Turkish force holding the position consisted of at least 1,600 cavalry, 12,000 infantry, and 30 guns. According to the Turkish General Staff, the number of effective enemy rifles actually holding the positions totalled about 9,000.

‡ It is believed that the only Turkish force remaining in front of Kut at this time consisted of their 45th Division numbering between 3,000 and 4,000 rifles. Speaking of a later date, General von Gleich, in "Vom Balkan nach Baghdad," gives the strength of the Turkish 45th Division opposite Kut as only 2,500 men.

‖ Sunrise was about 7 a.m.

§ At 10.15 a.m. they returned and reported no signs of enemy working round the right. After this the 16th Cavalry were brought under Genera Aylmer's direct orders.

General Harvey, with one and three-quarter battalions* and the 72nd Heavy Battery, was sent to take up a position of observation some three and a half miles north of the bridge. This hostile movement could also be seen from Corps Headquarters.

On both banks, owing to reorganisation of units, readjustment and consolidation of positions, the search for wounded and escorting carts, etc., the troops had been fully occupied for most of the wet and cold night; and the morning of the 8th January found officers and men very tired. The inadequate medical arrangements were quite insufficient to cope with the heavy casualties and the wounded endured much suffering, to which the inclement weather contributed greatly.

At 7.40 a.m. General Aylmer informed General Kemball that, as it was inadvisable to make further attacks on the left bank until his force was in a position to assist such attacks by enfilade and reverse fire, General Kemball was to attack and drive the enemy out of Shaikh Saad. For this purpose the Cavalry Brigade, the 62nd Punjabis and the 19th Field Battery from the left bank would be placed under General Kemball's orders. This order had only just been despatched when a message was received from General Kemball saying that at 6.50 a.m. the 28th Brigade had engaged the enemy to the west and north of the position they had captured the previous day; that the enemy seemed to be retiring in long lines on both banks; that as soon as the cavalry and artillery came up General Kemball would engage the enemy and endeavour to help the left bank force; and that the losses of General Kemball's force on the previous day had been very heavy.

By 10.30 a.m. the news received by General Aylmer showed that the reports of the enemy's retirement seemed to be premature. On the left bank some troops had withdrawn on the enemy's extreme left flank, but a Turkish brigade seemed to be making a wide outflanking movement to the north. On the right bank General Kemball's artillery had been engaged with Turkish guns posted in front of Shaikh Saad, and owing to the fire of these guns the British cavalry brigade moved further to the left, leaving a squadron 14th Hussars with General Kemball for reconnaissance purposes. This squadron did valuable service by a bold and rapid advance, which drew heavy infantry fire and disclosed a force of about 500 infantry in trenches about half a mile eastward of Shaikh Saad. Further confirmation of the enemy's intention to hold to the right bank

* 1/4th Hampshire and 107th Pioneers.

was furnished about 11 a.m. by an air reconnaissance which reported about 5,000 Turkish troops between General Kemball's force and Shaikh Saad.

By 11.30 a.m. the 62nd Punjabis had joined General Kemball and had advanced past the position of the 56th Rifles to within five hundred yards of some Turkish advanced trenches, which were another five hundred yards or so in front of what appeared to be a strongly held position. General Kemball about this time reported signs of an enemy withdrawal on the left bank under the fire of the British artillery; and he himself proceeded to make a personal reconnaissance of the enemy positions to his own front.

At 12.15 General Aylmer heard from the 21st Brigade on the left bank that the enemy were not moving round to the British right; and he also heard that General Kemball's personal reconnaissance confirmed the information obtained by aeroplane of the Turkish force covering Shaikh Saad on the right bank. General Kemball hoped to attack them in the afternoon.

At 1 p.m., however, General Aylmer asked the latter's opinion whether his force was strong enough to capture Shaikh Saad without prohibitive loss and whether it would not be preferable for it to entrench and then to capture Shaikh Saad by a night attack in which the whole force would co-operate with him. In the meantime, General Kemball was to defer his attack. He replied that the course suggested by General Aylmer appeared to him the best. He could entrench strongly where he was and be in a position to attack in co-operation with the left bank force. His troops, he said, much needed rest, water and food. In reply, General Aylmer told him to take action accordingly.

During the afternoon General Aylmer rode forward and made a personal inspection of part of the 28th Brigade front, coming under a sharp fire from the enemy's snipers. But there were no incidents of any importance, although a few reports mentioned signs of enemy withdrawals. These were confirmed by an air reconnaissance which reported that, though there was still a considerable number of Turkish troops on both banks of the river below Shaikh Saad, an important movement upstream of troops and transport was in progress.

At 6 p.m. General Aylmer issued orders for the 19th and 21st Brigades to hold their own and the 35th Brigade trenches for the night; the 35th Brigade was to withdraw and form General Reserve near the bridge; and the 128th Pioneers*

* They seem to have lost their way in the dark as they had not reached the 9th Brigade position by 8.45 a.m. on the 9th.

were to join the 9th Infantry Brigade, which was to entrench itself some three miles north of the bridge. These movements would take place after dark. As it happened, however, the 19th Brigade after handing over their trenches to the 21st Brigade, missed their direction in the dark and only reached the 35th Brigade position at dawn. It was consequently decided not to carry out the relief.

The troops of the remaining brigades were fully occupied for the greater part of the night in removing wounded and bringing up ammunition, water and food; and consequently got little or no rest. Rain fell, there was considerable hostile firing, and the troops experienced great discomfort.

On the night of the 8th, in his report of the situation to General Nixon, General Aylmer said that owing to the exhaustion of his troops he had been unable to make any progress that day and that, opposed as he was by some 15,000 Turkish troops* and numerous Arabs, his forward progress was certain to be slow till reinforcements reached him.

Though the morning of the 9th January broke with mist and with rain falling—which continued steadily till 8.45 a.m.—hostile firing seemed to have ceased; but by now the muddy ground made all movement by land very difficult. Reports from early morning patrols on the right bank received by General Aylmer up to 10.45 a.m. indicated that the enemy were still holding their trenches; though just after 10 a.m. reports from the 16th Cavalry showed that the Turks had evacuated many of their trenches on the left bank. Just after 11 a.m. General Aylmer received confirmatory news of the Turkish evacuation of their left bank trenches, which the 16th Cavalry and 35th Brigade were proceeding to occupy; and at 11.25 a.m. a report came in from General Kemball saying that the 62nd Punjabis were advancing, but that the enemy were still in occupation of Shaikh Saad.

At 11.35 and 11.45 a.m. General Aylmer issued orders for a general advance along both banks to Shaikh Saad and for a cavalry reconnaissance beyond that place. The weather had been and still was too bad for an air reconnaissance.

At noon the Senior Naval Officer was asked to reconnoitre upstream with three gunboats as soon as the bridge had been opened to let them through. This was done about two hours later and the advancing gunboats found a line of enemy mines laid across the river level with the Turkish first line trenches.

* According to the Turkish General Staff this was an over-estimate.

It was two of these mines that had broken loose on the 6th and had come downstream.

The advanced troops of the 28th Brigade occupied Shaikh Saad before 2 p.m., finding it clear of the enemy. By 3 p.m. reports from the Cavalry Brigade said that the trenches westward of Shaikh Saad were unoccupied; at 4.30 p.m. General Aylmer went upstream in the *Mejidieh;* and soon afterwards reports from agents and others were received saying that the Turks had retired at least as far as Ora. The weather still continued to prevent all reconnaissance by air.

By nightfall General Aylmer's force was disposed as follows:— On the left bank, in the loop made by the Tigris immediately west of Shaikh Saad, were eleven infantry battalions of the 7th Division, with the 16th Cavalry and one heavy and two field batteries; on the right bank, close to Shaikh Saad, was General Kemball's force, consisting of the Cavalry Brigade, six and a quarter infantry battalions and one mountain and two field batteries; and at the camp by the bridge were two and a half infantry battalions of the 9th Brigade, three companies 128th Pioneers, 13th Sapper Company, one and a half heavy batteries, some 2,000 sick and wounded and the bulk of the land and river transport.

About midnight on the 9th/10th January, General Aylmer in his telegraphic reports of the situation to General Nixon said that as his troops were much exhausted* owing to the wet and cold he was obliged to halt on the 10th, when he hoped to obtain more definite information as to the movements of the enemy, who appeared to have retired on or above Ora.

General Aylmer had issued orders at midday on the 9th for the bridge to be broken up into rafts for towage upstream. Owing, however, to a rise in the river accompanied by rough weather, this was not finished till dark; the rafts consequently did not start upstream till about midday on the 10th; and the new bridge at Shaikh Saad was therefore not commenced till after dark that day.

In his report to General Nixon despatched at 1.40 p.m. on the 10th January, General Aylmer reported that his total casualties during the fighting at Shaikh Saad amounted to approximately 3,790, and that owing to his entirely inadequate medical equipment he had experienced the greatest difficulty in their

* It must be remembered that many of the units had come almost straight from Marseilles and for some weeks had had no opportunity for marching practice. Their marches before the battle, carried out often under a hot sun, had consequently been a considerable strain.

evacuation. The weather conditions had been most unfavourable and the roads were very bad.

During the morning of the 10th, aeroplane reconnaissance had been impossible owing to mist and rain, but was carried out in the early afternoon, when it confirmed the information gained by the cavalry and obtained by agents. This was that the enemy on the right bank and the bulk of their force on the left bank had retired as far as the Es Sinn position, those remaining nearer on the left bank being between the Suwada and the Suwaikiya marshes, with a small force about Ora.*

The action at Shaikh Saad had been a success for the British, but they had been prevented from pursuing their advantage so as to gain more decisive results by the tired state of the men and the bad weather, which had impeded their movements and stopped air and cavalry reconnaissance†; and they had been much hampered by the delay in evacuating their wounded. On the other hand, though the Turks had lost heavily‡ they had not only delayed General Aylmer but had caused him severe loss while themselves escaping anything like a decisive reverse. They had as a whole fought better and displayed greater skill than in their former actions on the Tigris, and this is all the more creditable as there is reason to believe that their men had been very short of food for several days.

On the evening of the 7th January when it had seemed to General Aylmer that his advance had drawn the bulk of the Turkish force away from Kut, he telegraphed to General Townshend informing him of this and asking him to consider the advisability of making a sortie. General Townshend, in his reply of the 8th, said that he did not know how may enemy troops still contained him, as they were hidden by the trenches, but he guessed them to be about 4,000. He had contemplated a sortie to harass the Turks on their retreat on the left bank past him. He then went on to give his views about cutting his way out in the event of General Aylmer being repulsed. This telegram which had been repeated to General Nixon, elicited an order from him to General Townshend forbidding such an attempt (i.e., to cut his way out) except in desperate extremity.

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* This aeroplane reconnaissance also showed that the Suwaikiya marsh extended much closer to the left bank of the Tigris than was apparent from the map.

† No photographic equipment was available for the air service till after the battle of Shaikh Saad.

‡ Their losses were subsequently estimated at 4,000, including 650 made prisoner.

General Aylmer then pointed out that, in asking General Townshend to consider a possible sortie, he had only intended him to create a diversion which would induce the Turks to reduce their force near Shaikh Saad; and he added that there was no idea of him having to cut his way through; though General Aylmer, as he was opposed by considerable numbers, contemplated some delay in reaching Kut. On the 9th, in replying, General Townshend expressed regret for the misunderstanding and asked General Aylmer for an air reconnaissance to be made to ascertain roughly the Turkish numbers round him, as he himself judged them to consist of at least a division. General Townshend concluded: "I should like to attack their main camp, burn it and drive off the ships. Such a diversion would bring Turks back here fast enough, I think. But there must be no doubt about winning and my troops now are naturally not the same men: they will defend well, but to leave trenches and cross open demands spirit and *élan*. This must hamper Turks greatly, as all ammunition has to come from steamers and barges at their main camp here."

During the 10th January some reorganisation and redistribution of General Aylmer's force was carried out. It was decided to send the Cavalry Brigade over to the left bank, where the whole of the Tigris Corps, except for a brigade group under General Kemball, was to be concentrated; a small detachment of the 16th Cavalry and half the 2nd Rajputs* were to garrison the post at Shaikh Saad on the advance being resumed; and the staff of the 7th Division, who had reached the front during the action at Shaikh Saad, were sent to relieve the temporary incumbents. By this time a fifth gunboat, *Grayfly*, had joined the naval flotilla, which, it was now arranged, should detach two gunboats, with headquarters at Ali Gharbi and Shaikh Saad respectively, for the duties of river convoy protection.

General Aylmer received a telegram from General Townshend on the 10th giving the opinion that the Turks were trying to gain time, by opposing General Aylmer, to allow of the arrival of a new army corps at Kut. General Townshend believed that one division of this corps was due at Kut on the 20th January and he expressed apprehension at its arrival.

General Aylmer decided to remain at Shaikh Saad the next day. His reasons and his general view of the situation are

* They reached the front from Basra on 11th January.

shown by the telegram he sent General Nixon at 1 p.m. on the 11th January*:—

"... I have been forced to remain here to await 2nd Rajputs and 61st Howitzer Battery which have just arrived and to evacuate as many sick and wounded as possible on their ships. Also on account of bridge not being yet ready. I advance to-morrow morning to Hanna bend .... Sick and wounded who cannot be evacuated before we leave, will remain here.

"After consulting Generals Younghusband and Kemball, I determined to continue the advance on Kut, but it is my distinct duty to point out that it is a most precarious undertaking, for which I, of course, accept full responsibility, as I consider the situation demands a supreme effort to relieve Townshend.

"Army Commander has full figures of enemy's strength and possibly 4,000 may be allowed for his losses and desertions at Shaikh Saad. My fighting strength amounts to about 10,000.

"We have to pass up the defile between Suwaikiya marsh and river, which is much narrower than shown on map. I have been unable to locate anything but cavalry north of Ora, but there may be troops towards Badra.† Enemy reported by local inhabitants as occupying position in advance of Es Sinn at narrowest part between Suwada and Suwaikiya marshes. This will probably be continued with advanced line from near Clery's Post‡ to river.

"My medical establishments, as you may calculate, are deplorably low and wounded cannot receive proper attention. Even if necessary to remove fighting men from ships, more must be sent up at once. I have only one aeroplane in action. On the other hand, I have the greatest confidence that the troops will do what is humanly possible and I know that the enemy's Arab troops are much demoralised."

In sending this telegram, General Aylmer wished to ensure that his difficulties should be made clear. He had been warned that the great sufferings of the wounded were affecting the spirits of his force, who in any case felt that they had a sufficiently difficult task before them; his inefficient bridging

* Repeated as usual to General Townshend.

† Some 45 miles north of Kut, on a caravan route. General Aylmer had received information from prisoners on the 10th that six Turkish battalions had retired in that direction.

‡ At south-east corner of Suwada marsh, see Volume I. Map 7.

material was causing him great anxiety, and he had come to the conclusion that he could expect little co-operation from the garrison of Kut in forcing the difficult defiles before him.

General Nixon, who was now very ill, replied on the 12th January that he must leave the matter to General Aylmer's decision, and that he was confident that General Aylmer and his fine troops would achieve their object. He also said that as many medical details as possible would be sent up by the next available ship from Basra.

Although General Aylmer's operations so far had lessened the strain on Kut and had minimised for the time being the chances of a successful Turkish assault there, it must be borne in mind that there were still two main factors which rendered undesirable further delay on General Aylmer's part. These were the reports (considered reliable) of the impending arrival of a fresh Turkish army corps, and General Aylmer's information that the British force in Kut had only sufficient food to last them till the end of the first week in February. Moreover, General Townshend's force, hemmed in a loop on the left bank of the Tigris, and without access to the right bank, seemed unable to co-operate with the relief force by active operations against the Turks in the vicinity of Kut.

Before concluding this chapter, it is necessary to refer briefly to the medical arrangements for the evacuation of the wounded at Shaikh Saad. As stated before, a separate medical history of the war has been compiled* and for that reason a detailed account of the medical work is not given here.

On the 7th January there was insufficient accommodation for the wounded either in the *Julnar* or in tents which had been pitched for the purpose. In consequence a very large proportion of the wounded had to lie out all night in the rain on the bare ground without shelter and without sufficient clothing and food. The medical personnel were too few to attend to all of them without many hours' delay† and the supply personnel were also too few to arrange for food for them. The removal of the wounded from the front line was mainly carried out after dark on the 7th, and it was not till daylight on the 8th that the very bad state of affairs became apparent. Efforts were then made with some success by officers and personnel

* "History of the Great War, Medical Services, General History," Vol. IV. By Major-General Sir W. G. Macpherson and Major T. J. Mitchell.

† The medical officers were continuously at work till midday on the 9th and that generally at only giving first aid.

of other corps to assist and get some shelter and food for the wounded. Even then, however, and for some days after, the medical establishments were unable to cope with all the work and as a result the wounded and sick endured very great suffering.*

The total British casualties amounted to 4,007, of whom 417 were killed.

It is noteworthy that at this period the War Office in London considered it necessary to warn General Nixon that the Constantinople *communiqués* estimated so correctly the strength and casualties of General Aylmer's force as to give the impression that they might possibly be tapping the British telegraph cables.

* Mr. Edmund Candler in "The Long Road to Baghdad," gives a graphic account of these sufferings; and the Vincent-Bingley and Mesopotamia Commissions enter into the details of the series of errors and misfortunes which led to this state of affairs.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ACTION OF THE WADI AND THE FIRST ATTACK ON HANNA. (MAPS 15 AND 16.)

ON the afternoon of the 11th January, General Aylmer learnt, as the result of an air reconnaissance, that the retiring Turkish force had returned and were entrenching a position on the right bank of the Wadi stream, their strength being estimated at 11,000. There is reason to believe that this action on the part of the Turks was due to the accession to the command of the Turkish force of Halil Bey in place of Nur-ud-Din. Whatever the reason may have been, however, the news was welcomed by General Aylmer. This new Turkish position was some three and a half miles eastward of and outside the long and narrow Hanna defile formed by the Suwaikiya marsh and the Tigris. Consequently, by offering him a flank against which he could manoeuvre, the Turks seemed to be giving General Aylmer another chance of obtaining the decisive success which he had hoped for but had not attained at Shaikh Saad.

General Aylmer at once decided to take advantage of the opportunity. To give the impression that he meant to remain where he was for the time being, he ordered the 7th Division to entrench themselves that night in a position covering his camp to the north-westward and northward, while General Kemball was to send two of his battalions up the right bank next morning to entrench a position some five miles upstream. On the night following, these battalions would return and cross to the left bank, where General Aylmer would at the same time move his cavalry brigade and the 7th Division well to the north, to a position from which they would advance at dawn on the 13th, so as to envelop the Turkish left flank while the remainder of his force held the enemy in front.

According to the air report, the main Turkish force was still on the left bank of the Tigris, where their trenches extended along the western edge of the Wadi for about two and a quarter miles from the Tigris, the extreme left of their line being in a redoubt on the Wadi bank. The Wadi stream* was at that time said by Arab agents to be easily fordable and even almost dry in places above the Turkish position.

Air reconnaissance during the 12th January confirmed the

* The available information led to the nature of this obstacle being underestimated.

information already obtained of the Turkish dispositions, the strength of their detachment on the right bank being estimated at about five hundred.* During the day the Cavalry Brigade advanced some ten miles northwards and reconnoitred the route for the night march, encountering only slight opposition from a few Arabs posted near some ruins about eight miles north-north-westward of Shaikh Saad.

The German writer Kiesling says that the Turkish force on the left bank consisted of their cavalry brigade, the 35th and 52nd Divisions, and that, owing to their losses in the fighting round Kut and at Shaikh Saad, they were very weak in numbers. The 35th Division held the right of the Turkish line and the 52nd Division the left, with the cavalry brigade on the left flank, where the Turks had made no entrenchments. By this time Goltz, hearing of Nur-ud-Din's action in moving down the Tigris, had hastened back ; and was at or near Halil's headquarters on the 13th.

In the evening of the 12th January General Aylmer's operation orders were issued. They directed the following preliminary movements to be made after dark the same day :— The 7th Division,† followed by the Cavalry Brigade,‡ were to move to a position of assembly three miles east of the ruins.‖

* The British troops on the right bank estimated them at rather more.

† During the operations 12th–14th January, the 7th Division under General Younghusband consisted of :—

19th Infantry Brigade (General Harvey).—
1/Seaforth Highlanders. 28th Punjabis. 92nd Punjabis. 125th Rifles.
21st Infantry Brigade (General Norie).—
2/Black Watch. 6th Jats. 9th Bhopal Infantry. 41st Dogras. 1/9th Gurkhas.
35th Infantry Brigade (General Rice).—
1/5th Buffs. 37th Dogras. 62nd Punjabis. 97th Infantry. 102nd Grenadiers.
Note.—The 21st and 35th Infantry Brigades had each been reinforced by an extra battalion.
Half battalion 128th Pioneers.
9th Brigade, R.F.A. (eighteen 18-pounder Q.F. guns).
1/1st Sussex Battery, R.F.A. (four 15-pounder guns).
23rd Mountain Battery (four guns).
Improvised Divisional Signal Company.
Field ambulances.

‡ 6th Cavalry Brigade (General Roberts).—
" S " Battery, R.H.A. (four guns). 14th Hussars. 4th Cavalry. 7th Lancers. 16th Cavalry. 33rd Cavalry (less one squadron).

‖ General Aylmer selected this position for the following reasons. The best place for a large force to cross the Wadi was where the majority of the retiring Turkish force including their artillery had crossed a few days earlier, i.e., west of the ruins. The Turkish outposts would presumably hold the ruins and a line southward of them, consequently the route selected for the 7th Division would mean not only less risk of detection, but was also more free from obstacles to movement than the direct route. A position of assembly nearer the ruins entailed a wheel to the left, a difficult matter for a large force at night, and General Aylmer decided against it.

The 28th Brigade was to take over the trenches of the 19th and 21st Brigades and push forward its line during the night for about one and a half miles, its left to be about one thousand yards from the Tigris. The Corps Artillery,* covered by the 28th Brigade, were to entrench themselves in rear of that brigade in positions which had already been indicated to them ; the 9th Infantry Brigade† would be in reserve on the left bank near Shaikh Saad, where the camp and bridge were to be protected by the Provisional Battalion and the 13th Sapper Company ; and a small column, consisting of a squadron 33rd Cavalry and half the 2nd Rajputs, was to remain on the right bank. At this time half the 128th Pioneers and a company of the 107th Pioneers were still at the Musandaq camp, and the total number of effective rifles in General Aylmer's force available for the operation was approximately 10,000. The Cavalry Brigade, though comprising a number of units, was also weak in effective strength.

On the 13th January, at 6.30 a.m., the 7th Division, with the Cavalry Brigade co-operating on its outer flank, was to move off due west from the position of assembly in echelon of brigades from the left and was to envelop the enemy's left flank by a wide turning movement. The 28th Brigade was to hold the enemy to the southern portion of his trenches, while the Corps Artillery were to bombard the enemy's position and were to co-operate in the general attack. The small column on the right bank of the Tigris was to act as flank guard and protect the gunboats, which, under the orders of the Senior Naval Officer, would pass through the bridge at 6.30 a.m., preceded by mine-sweepers, and co-operate with the attack.

All troops were to carry two days' cooked rations on the man and, as the water in the Wadi was reported to be brackish, twenty transport carts were to carry additional drinking water for the 7th Division. Only first line transport was to move with the fighting troops, but the second line transport was to be ready to march when required. General Aylmer's headquarters would be in the *Mejidieh*.

The night of the 12th/13th, though cold, was clear with

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* 61st Howitzer Battery = six 4·5-inch howitzers.
72nd Heavy Battery = four 5-inch howitzers.
77th Heavy Battery = four 5-inch howitzers.
104th Heavy Battery (less one section) = two 4-inch guns.
Total : 16 guns and howitzers.

† 1/4th Hampshire (only three companies strong), 107th Pioneers (less one company), and half battalion 2nd Rajputs.

the moon in the second quarter, and the 7th Division, after concentration, began their northward march at 9.45 p.m. The ground was level, no obstacles were encountered, and by 2.30 a.m. the division was formed up at the position of assembly in line of brigades facing west (35th on the right, 19th in the centre and 21st on the left) with its artillery in rear.

General Kemball's 28th Infantry Brigade began crossing from the right bank of the Tigris about dusk, but as the 51st and 53rd Sikhs had first to withdraw five miles downstream, the occupation of the trenches vacated by the 19th and 21st Brigades was not completed till 3.30 a.m. For this reason, and as the Turks had occupied an advanced position with their left on a strong walled enclosure (Chittab Fort) about 2,500 yards from the trenches, the 28th Brigade did not push forward during the night.

Dawn broke on the 13th January with a thick mist, but this soon lifted.* The Corps Artillery and naval guns, co-operating with the 28th Brigade, drove the Turks from their advanced position eastward of the Wadi ; and by noon this was occupied by the 28th Brigade, who were still, however, over 3,000 yards from the main enemy position on the far side of the Wadi.

Owing to the mist, the forward movement of the 7th Division did not commence till 7.30 a.m. The advance was carried out in echelon of brigades from the left, the 20th Field Battery being attached to the leading infantry brigade (21st) ; the remainder of the artillery, followed by the field ambulances, came in rear of the centre brigade (19th) ; and the cavalry guarded the right flank and operated to the right front.

No opposition nor obstacles were encountered till the Wadi was reached. There were several fords through this and all three infantry brigades crossed it by 10 a.m. ; but its steep banks proved a serious obstacle for the artillery and transport. Consequently, in spite of hard work by the two companies 128th Pioneers, all the guns were not across till nearly 1 p.m., and the transport had not finished crossing at dark. This had a serious effect on the medical arrangements, for so many wounded reached the field ambulances before they had crossed that they got no farther than the west bank ; and as this was some miles from the centre of the fighting, the available transport proved inadequate for the evacuation of casualties.

At 10 a.m., after the Cavalry Brigade had forced a body of mounted Arabs to retire to the north-west, the advance was

* Sunrise was about 7 a.m.

resumed in a south-westerly direction, i.e., towards the eastern exit of the Hanna defile ; and the 21st Brigade soon began to meet opposition from small parties of the enemy.

At 11 a.m. two Turkish guns opened fire on the brigade, and its advanced guard—a company of the 1/9th Gurkhas—came under heavy rifle and machine gun fire from their left front. The 20th Field Battery came into action and a second Gurkha company was sent up to reinforce the advanced guard, which was thus able to continue a gradual advance. A body of the enemy was then seen about two thousand yards away moving up the right bank of the Wadi and the remaining half battalion of the 1/9th Gurkhas was moved to the left of the advanced guard with their left reinforced to give flank protection. The enemy's fire had drawn the advanced guard to the left of their original line of direction and the greater part of the Gurkhas were now facing almost due south.

In pursuance of their task—which was to hold the enemy's left while the 19th Brigade on the immediate right of the 21st Brigade, and the 35th and Cavalry Brigades still farther to the right, manœuvred against the enemy's rear—the 21st Brigade gradually deployed to the right of their advanced guard. The 41st Dogras came up on the right of the 9th Gurkhas but, as their left company had conformed to the change of direction of the Gurkhas while the remainder of the battalion at first maintained its south-westerly direction, there were gaps in their line, which were filled by the 9th Bhopal Infantry. These two battalions got within distances varying from three hundred and fifty to five hundred yards from the hostile line, which, at first consisting of Turkish skirmishers, was gradually reinforced ; and the Turks were evidently entrenching themselves. The Black Watch, prolonging to the right the line of the 41st, came under heavy infantry fire at about six hundred yards' range and dug themselves in ; the 20th Field Battery moved up in closer support and opened fire at 2,900 yards range ; and the last battalion of the brigade, the 6th Jats, came up and prolonged the line to the right of the Black Watch.

At 12 noon, the 21st Brigade, all its infantry in action, reported to divisional headquarters that the enemy to its front were dug in along slightly rising ground and appeared to be holding a very extended position. What had happened, as subsequently ascertained,* was that the Turks had moved

* This is according to British accounts. The Turkish account, if published, is not yet available in this country.

men over to face the threat to their left flank and were holding and hastily entrenching a long irrigation cut with a bank which ran backwards from the left of their line and almost at right angles to the Wadi. General Younghusband does not appear to have realised this. He ordered the 21st Brigade to check its advance to allow for the arrival of the guns delayed by the Wadi crossing and at the same time he directed the 19th Brigade to move forward and prolong the right of the 21st Brigade, so as to outflank the enemy and reach the river.* The 35th Brigade was still to remain in reserve.

By 1.30 p.m. all General Younghusband's artillery was in action. The 19th Brigade had begun to come into action on the right of the 21st Brigade, which had now reached a position within three hundred yards of the enemy but was waiting for the 19th Brigade to come up on its right flank before pressing its attack. General Younghusband's conception of the situation is shown by the message he despatched at that hour to Corps headquarters† :—" Norie's brigade (21st) attacking in a south-westerly direction. Harvey's brigade (19th) prolonging down towards the river on Norie's right. All batteries in action also firing south-west at 3,500 yards' range at the rear of the enemy's guns and trenches. Enemy's guns firing directly to their rear. From this it would appear that they are being pinched between Kemball and the 7th Division. Rice's brigade (35th) still in reserve. I don't think we have had many casualties."

By 2.30 p.m. the general situation was as follows. The 19th and 21st Brigades, both facing nearly due south, were closely engaged with the enemy, who was bringing up reserves to meet their attack. Two battalions of the 19th Brigade‡ were in the front line within about three hundred yards of the enemy ; and of the 21st Brigade a company of the 9th Bhopals and a company of the 41st Dogras were within a hundred and fifty yards of the enemy, but had suffered heavy losses. General Younghusband's artillery were in action behind the 21st Brigade at varying distances from the hostile position and their fire appears to have drawn to themselves the greater part of the Turkish artillery fire, thus saving somewhat the British infantry. The 35th Brigade was in reserve about a thousand yards in rear of the 21st Brigade ; and the Cavalry Brigade, which had

* It is evident that he did not realise that the 21st Brigade were some three miles north of the river.

† Received by General Aylmer at 3.45 p.m.

‡ 92nd Punjabis and 125th Rifles.

moved westward after crossing the Wadi and had forced several hostile squadrons* to retire northward or southward, was to the right rear. This situation was seen at that hour by a British aeroplane, which reported it to General Aylmer, who was thus fairly acquainted with the positions of the respective combatants on this flank.

The 28th Brigade was on a line running roughly at right angles to the Tigris, with its right near Chittab Fort, near which vicinity the sixteen guns of the Corps Artillery were in position ; and General Kemball, after making all preparations for his attack, including registration by the Corps Artillery, was awaiting the development of General Younghusband's attack before pressing on with his own. Visibility was not good, even from the small tower of Chittab Fort.

Three gunboats† were on the Tigris, to the left rear of the 28th Brigade, shelling the Turkish right, being protected from attack from the right bank by the small column there ; and the 9th Brigade was in reserve on the left bank about a mile and a half north-west of Shaikh Saad.

The aeroplane also reported a force of 4,000 to 5,000 Turks as being at the eastern end of the Hanna defile, which was covered by a line of trenches.

By 3 p.m. the 19th Brigade, with three and a half battalions absorbed into their front line, were closely engaged ; but neither they nor the 21st Brigade were able to make any substantial progress, and large numbers of the enemy were seen by the 21st Brigade moving across their front in a north-north-westerly direction.‡ At 4 p.m. a divisional staff officer returned from a reconnaissance down the Wadi and reported having seen a column, estimated at three battalions of infantry, retiring upstream.‖ General Younghusband sent this information to the Cavalry Brigade and directed them to close the gap between the 19th Brigade and the river. The 35th Brigade§ was also sent to close this gap and the 23rd Mountain Battery was moved up to the right of the 19th Brigade to cover with fire the ground between that brigade and the river. But both the 35th and the Cavalry Brigades were checked. The

* These hostile squadrons were said to have suffered considerable casualties from the fire of " S " Battery, R.H.A.

† *Gadfly*, *Cranefly* and *Dragonfly*.

‡ Apparently reinforcements for the threatened flank.

‖ These may have been those seen by the 21st Brigade an hour before, or other reinforcements for the Turkish rear and left flank.

§ Less 102nd Grenadiers. This battalion had been posted on the left of the artillery to meet the contingency of a counter-attack from the Turkish left along the Wadi, which reports had indicated as possible.

28th Punjabis (on the right of the 19th Brigade) and the 1/5th Buffs (on the left of the 35th Brigade) did indeed assault and penetrate the Turkish trenches in front of them at about 5.30 p.m.* ; but they were driven back again by enfilade fire. At 4.40 p.m. troops had been seen advancing from the direction of Shaikh Saad, and a little later a message was received by General Younghusband from Corps headquarters showing that this was General Kemball's Brigade attacking ; General Younghusband accordingly instructed his brigadiers to co-operate with this attack as far as possible.

At 6.40 p.m. General Younghusband reported to Corps headquarters :—" My troops ring round Turks except for small portion by river, which I hope to fill in shortly. Troops from direction of Shaikh Saad are advancing and heavy fire still going on. Troops taking up positions they now hold for the night. Our cavalry has operated on my right flank." There is no record when this message, which gave an incorrect idea of the true situation of General Younghusband's force, reached Corps headquarters, but at 9.10 p.m. General Aylmer in a situation report to General Nixon said : " Younghusband has pushed in on north of position and claims that his right flank is almost up to River Tigris." A later message sent at 7.30 p.m. by General Younghusband giving further details of his situation —as he conceived it to be—was received by Corps headquarters at 11.15 p.m. This will be referred to after the action of the 28th and 9th Brigades against the Turkish front has been described.

Just before 3 p.m. General Aylmer ordered the 9th Brigade to the line of trenches held by the 28th Brigade the previous night ; and, soon after, he sent a message to the Senior Naval Officer saying that General Kemball was about to advance and asking if the gunboats could co-operate more closely with him. At 3.45 p.m. General Aylmer received General Younghusband's situation report of 1.30 p.m., already referred to, and at 4 p.m. he heard that the *Gadfly* had moved upstream. General Kemball was then communicated with by telephone. He was told that the enemy was seriously engaged in flank and rear by the 7th Division ; that there were indications that part of the hostile position to the front of the 28th Brigade was being vacated ; and that the 9th Brigade was being ordered forward to join him.† On receiving this message General Kemball at once gave his waiting troops the order to advance

* Sunset was about 5.20 p.m.

† He was to send instructions to meet it at Chittab Fort.

to the assault, an order shortly afterwards approved by the Corps Commander by telephone.

The 28th Brigade, supported by the fire of the Corps Artillery, advanced shortly afterwards, directing their attack against the left centre of the Turkish line along the Wadi. The 56th Rifles formed firing line and supports, followed by the 53rd Sikhs as second line ; the Leicestershire were echeloned on the left flank level with the 53rd Sikhs ; and the 51st Sikhs followed the 53rd in reserve.

The attack was pushed forward with speed and determination. Hostile fire was encountered at about eleven hundred yards from the Wadi, and when they got within about six hundred yards the infantry began to suffer heavy casualties. But they had been instructed to attack with great vigour and, in spite of these heavy losses, the 28th Brigade responded grandly. The ground, which was dotted with low bushes, had been cleared within five hundred yards of the Wadi, the Turks having marked the ranges on it by sticks at every hundred metres ; and with the exception of the bushes it was practically destitute of cover except for a shallow irrigation cut some fifty yards short of the Wadi. In a fine rush, the 56th, well supported by the 53rd, reached this irrigation cut and then beyond it to the bank of the Wadi, but their losses, including that of their gallant commander, Major F. D. Browne, mortally wounded, were so heavy, especially in the last fifty yards or so, that they could get no further. Eventually, after heavy losses, the 56th Rifles, 53rd Sikhs and Leicestershire were merged in an irregular firing line at a standstill two to three hundred yards from the Wadi. Half the 51st Sikhs were thrown in, but their commander (Lieutenant-Colonel Beadon) was mortally wounded and this reinforcement failed to carry on the line materially. The fight remained thus stationary under a heavy cross-fire of machine guns. The 9th Brigade, which had only received General Aylmer's orders to advance just before dark, had not yet reached Chittab Fort* ; and the Turks held tenaciously to their trenches, which were well protected by the Wadi. This stream, with its deep banks under close range fire from the Turkish trenches, constituted a formidable obstacle.

As darkness fell, there being no longer any hope of success, the remnants of the 28th Brigade were withdrawn, having suffered a total of 648 casualties. Of these, which included three out of the four battalion commanders, the Leicestershire

* They got there at 6.40 p.m.

contributed 210, the 53rd Sikhs 194, the 56th Rifles 172, and the 51st Sikhs about 60. Though the attack failed, its conduct affords a fine testimony to the gallantry and soldierly behaviour of the 28th Brigade, already much weakened by their heavy losses at Shaikh Saad a week before.*

Thus, at dusk, both frontal and flanking attacks had been definitely checked.

At 7.30 p.m. General Younghusband reported his situation† as follows:—"21st Brigade on left with five battalions in firing line: 19th Brigade in centre, with two companies Seaforths in reserve, remainder in firing line: 35th Brigade (less one battalion) on right and attempting to reach the river. Distance from present right to river not accurately known but believed to be one mile. Effort now being made to close this up and cut off the Turkish retirement. One battalion 35th Brigade in general reserve behind left flank of the division. For to-night all troops will hold the ground gained during the day. Hospitals are bivouacking on the Wadi about four miles from the river . . . . Estimate of casualties not yet available but fighting has been close all afternoon and still continues."

The records of the 35th Brigade show that General Younghusband was still under a misapprehension as to the situation of his infantry. The 35th Brigade had been definitely checked in a position about two and a half miles north of the Tigris and there is nothing to indicate that they made any serious attempts to advance further than this after dark. In any case any idea of such further advance was abandoned about 9.30 p.m. on receipt of a message, sent originally‡ by General Aylmer at 7.45 p.m., which warned General Younghusband to look out for a counter-attack from the Hanna defile, where a body of some 4,000 enemy troops had been located during the afternoon by an aeroplane.‖

At 10.15 p.m. General Aylmer heard from General Kemball that the attack of the 28th Brigade had proved more costly than was at first thought; that a night attack was not considered feasible; and that as General Younghusband had got

* See p. 232.

† Received by General Aylmer at 11.15 p.m.

‡ Received by General Younghusband about 8.30 p.m., but could not be deciphered and a repetition had to be asked for.

‖ The Turkish General Staff say that on the 13th there were only three engineer companies (about 200 men) in the defensive line at Hanna between the Suwaikiya marsh and the Tigris. Towards evening two battalions of the 51st Division and two batteries arrived on that line. There were no other units on that line.

round the enemy General Kemball proposed for next morning a heavy bombardment of the enemy's entrenchments directed by observation officers pushed well forward. He did not recommend another assault. In the meantime he was withdrawing the 28th Brigade behind outposts thrown out by the 9th Brigade from the vicinity of Chittab Fort. General Aylmer accepted this view and agreed to General Kemball's proposals.

During the day (13th), the force at the immediate disposal of General Aylmer had been increased by the arrival of the half battalion 128th Pioneers and the company 107th Pioneers from Musandaq camp and of the 93rd Infantry from Basra. These troops spent the night 13th/14th in the vicinity of Shaikh Saad, where the right bank column and the gunboats had returned after dark.

The night of the 13th/14th was bitterly cold with some rain. There were outbursts of enemy fire at various times during the night, but these died away towards morning. At 7 a.m. on the 14th January General Younghusband received reports from his brigade commanders that the enemy had apparently evacuated his position and that patrols had been sent out to verify this. General Younghusband sent on this information at once to Corps headquarters, saying that he was pushing forward to ascertain the situation.*

At 7.45 a.m. General Aylmer received information from General Younghusband that according to prisoners the Turks had lost very heavily. The Cavalry Brigade had moved out about 7 a.m. to the position they had held the previous evening and had despatched a squadron of the 7th Lancers to ascertain the enemy's dispositions. At 8 a.m. General Younghusband ordered the 35th Brigade, followed by the 19th and 21st Brigades, to move down to the river and then march upstream and occupy the eastern end of the Hanna defile. At 9.25 a.m. General Aylmer sent General Younghusband a message saying that General Kemball reported the enemy having vacated the eastern front of his position, to be retiring in large masses† on the Hanna defile; and that he was starting in pursuit of them. General Younghusband was to press forward and endeavour to inflict as much loss as possible at the Hanna defile.

The 35th Brigade, marching due south, reached the Tigris

* Received by Corps headquarters at 7.10 a.m. and passed on by them to General Kemball.

† An hour and a half later General Kemball reported that these may have been General Younghusband's troops.

at 9.15 a.m. and then started upstream, pushing forward a company of the 62nd Punjabis, who found that the enemy in strength were holding a line of trenches at the eastern end of the Hanna defile. This line, approximately 1,350 yards long, extended from the Tigris into the Suwaikiya marsh and its occupation by an enemy force had already been discovered by the 7th Lancers squadron. An aeroplane reconnaissance at 10 a.m. confirmed this information.* The 19th and 21st Brigades closed up to the 35th Brigade, the artillery with General Younghusband came into action against the enemy's position, and preparations were being made to launch an attack, when General Younghusband received the following message, despatched from Corps headquarters at 12.10 p.m. :—" Ensure ample artillery preparation before you attack enemy trenches . . . . General Kemball should co-operate with his guns and Corps guns should assist."

This necessitated waiting till the necessary concentration could be made ; and this was so much delayed, owing largely to the high wind and rain storms, that no attack took place that day.

On receiving news of the enemy's retirement, General Aylmer soon after 9 a.m. had asked the Senior Naval Officer to push on as far as possible with his gunboats and had sent orders for the bridge of boats at Shaikh Saad to be dismantled, formed into rafts and towed upstream. Captain Nunn with the *Gadfly* and *Cranefly* at once moved upstream, but, being met by well-directed Turkish artillery fire, which holed the *Gadfly*† about 1 p.m., was obliged to withdraw. The rough weather interfered greatly with the work of dismantling and towing the boat bridge, much of its material being washed away or sunk, and only part of it reached the Wadi during the afternoon.

It had become clear to General Aylmer at an early hour that by slipping away in the dark to their position in the Hanna defile the Turks had managed to evade the decisive defeat he had hoped to inflict on them ; and it was a bitter disappointment. Though he estimated their losses at 2,000, his own force had suffered almost as many, namely, 1,613. Of these, the 28th Brigade had contributed proportionately the most. The casualties in the 7th Division had not been so heavy, for though the 19th and 21st Brigades each had casualties

* Result of their report was sent by Corps headquarters to General Kemball at 11.25 a.m. and he was directed to send it on to General Younghusband and the Cavalry Brigade.

† *Gadfly* had to be sent next day to Abadan for repair.

amounting to over 400,* the 35th Brigade had only lost 39 officers and men.

Kiesling says that at nightfall on the 13th January the Turkish 52nd Division was closely involved holding back the British flank attack, that their cavalry brigade was occupying the gap between the 52nd and the marsh and that the 35th Division was holding generally the line of the Wadi. Goltz, he says, realising that the Turkish force had little chance of holding renewed British attacks next day, ordered the Turks to break off during the night and withdraw to the prepared position in the Hanna defile. This withdrawal, Kiesling says, was carried out successfully without being noticed by the British.

The following comments on this action by the Turkish General Staff are of interest. The 35th Division, not having been pinned down to their position along the Wadi by the British infantry under General Kemball, had been able to send all their reserves to reinforce and support the left flank of the position. On the evening of the 13th January only four battalions (1,500 rifles) of the 35th Division remained on the Wadi line in front of General Kemball, all their other units having reinforced the left flank. The Turkish 52nd Division on the left flank facing north was weak in strength and this part of the front had to be so much extended that by evening, when it was up to the Suwaikiya marsh, it was very weakly held. The Turkish General Staff consider that a bold British attack in the afternoon against this northern front would have cut off the line of retreat of the 35th and part of the 52nd Divisions and of their artillery.

A special point deserving notice is the long time which messages took in transit, owing to the inadequate means of communication. This, of course, imposed considerable limitations upon the control General Aylmer was able to exercise.

In his report telegraphed to General Nixon on the evening of the 14th January, General Aylmer, after saying that owing to his difficulties of communication he had till then only obtained an outline of the results of the action, continued :—

> " The situation at present is that a considerable force of the enemy, probably a rear guard, is holding an entrenched position across the gap between marsh and River

* The 92nd Punjabis had 179 casualties, the 41st Dogras 175, while the 9th Bhopal Infantry, 125th Rifles and 1/9th Gurkhas each had over 100 General Norie in his report paid a high tribute to the gallantry of the 41st Dogras, who lost their commander (Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. Tribe, C.M.G.).

Tigris three miles west of Wadi. Out of this he must be driven before my force can advance further towards Kut.* I am now considering the best means of preventing enemy taking up a series of similar positions through the defile formed by river and marsh. This is some twelve miles in length, and, four miles beyond, the Es Sinn position is reached. The operations now to be undertaken will probably decide whether the enemy holds the Es Sinn position or not, but indications at present point to the likelihood of his doing so, as troops have recently been observed adding to its former defences. I should add that the enemy troops with whom I am now engaged are of a very different class to those who opposed the earlier advances up the Tigris—the bulk of these troops now being Turks . . . ."

That evening it began again to rain hard and the clogging, clinging mud thus created was infinitely more disadvantageous to the attackers than to the defenders. In fact it is no exaggeration to say that at this period the best allies the Turks could have were the rain, the gales and the floods.

During the night 14th/15th the greater part of General Aylmer's force bivouacked on the left bank of the Tigris between the forward position of the 35th Brigade, some two miles eastward of the Hanna defile, and the eastern bank of the mouth of the Wadi. The main exceptions were the 102nd Grenadiers and half the 128th Pioneers, which bivouacked inland with the 7th Division field ambulances, a company of the 93rd Infantry on the right bank of the Tigris opposite the Wadi, and the small right bank column, with the 1/1st Gurkhas (just arrived from Basra), at Shaikh Saad. The boisterous weather had prevented all attempts at bridging the Tigris at the Wadi and rendered it not only very difficult for General Aylmer to get into communication with the 7th Division,† but impossible to send supplies and ammunition up to them.

General Aylmer, however, decided that the 7th Division should continue the advance the next morning against what he conceived to be the enemy's rear guard on the left bank, and orders to that effect were issued at 11.30 p.m. on the 14th.

* General Aylmer's lack of land transport tied him to the river; and his bridging train could not be transported by land at all. Further, there was only one practicable passage, almost due north of Kut, through the very extensive Suwaikiya marsh, and to reach this involved a detour of some fifty miles from the Wadi.

† A report of his situation sent off by General Younghusband at 1.10 p.m. did not reach Corps headquarters till 10 p.m.

Just afterwards, General Aylmer heard from General Younghusband that he estimated the enemy's position at the Hanna defile to be too strong to be taken by a frontal attack and that it would probably be necessary to enfilade it by sending guns over to the right bank of the Tigris. Soon after this, after further consideration and in view of the very bad weather, General Aylmer sent General Younghusband instructions to cancel the order for next morning's attack, stating at the same time that he would come upstream to see General Younghusband next day at 7 a.m.

The weather showed no improvement on the morning of the 15th, and rain and very high wind prevailed throughout the day. General Aylmer, assured by General Younghusband that his troops were in no condition to carry the Hanna defile by a frontal assault, decided to transfer all available troops except the 7th Division to the right bank of the Tigris in order to outflank the trenches in the defile.

On the previous day the headquarters of the 3rd (Lahore) Division* and of the 7th and 9th Infantry Brigades had arrived from Basra; and General Aylmer's force was once more reorganised.† It now comprised the 3rd and 7th Divisions and Corps Troops.

* i.e., Major-General H. D'U. Keary and his staff.

† *3rd Division.*

7th Brigade.—
1/1st Gurkhas. 1/9th Gurkhas. 93rd Infantry.
9th Brigade.—
1/4th Hampshire (less one company). 107th Pioneers. 2nd Rajputs (less half battalion). 62nd Punjabis.
28th Brigade.—
2/Leicestershire. 51st Sikhs. 53rd Sikhs. 56th Rifles.
Divisional Troops.—
One battery, 9th Brigade, R.F.A. 61st Howitzer Battery. 23rd Mountain Battery (less one section). Cavalry Brigade (a) (less two squadrons). Administrative units and field ambulances.

7th Division.

19th Brigade.—
1/Seaforth Highlanders. 28th Punjabis. 92nd Punjabis. 125th Rifles.
21st Brigade.—
2/Black Watch. 6th Jats. 9th Bhopal Infantry. 41st Dogras.
35th Brigade.—
1/5th Buffs. 97th Infantry. 37th Dogras. 102nd Grenadiers.
Divisional Troops.—
9th Brigade, R.F.A. (less one battery). 1/1st Sussex Battery, R.F.A. 72nd Heavy Battery, R.G.A. 128th Pioneers. Two squadrons cavalry. Administrative units and field ambulances.

Corps Troops.

13th Company, Sappers and Miners, and Bridging Train.
77th Heavy Battery, R.G.A.
One Section 104th Heavy Battery, R.G.A.
Air Service.

(a) Temporarily placed under General Keary's orders for operations on the right bank.

The evacuation of the wounded was carried on throughout the 15th January and proved a most difficult undertaking, which was not completed till the morning of the 16th. The weather prevented any air reconnaissance, and, although a certain amount of bridging material was brought up to the Wadi and a bridge constructed over that stream, it was found impossible to begin a bridge across the Tigris, which was now a boisterous yellow flood. Forty per cent. of the *danaks* of the bridging train were wrecked or sunk on that and the previous day and the remainder were almost all badly strained or damaged. During the day, two guns of the 23rd Mountain Battery, the remaining three companies of the 93rd Infantry, and the 1/1st Gurkhas were ferried across to the right bank of the Tigris, a difficult and tedious operation owing to the state of the river. Joined by the squadron 33rd Cavalry from the right bank column, they were posted during the night opposite the Wadi.

On the evening of the 15th General Aylmer received a telegram from General Townshend which expressed anxiety at having had no information of General Aylmer's movements since the news that the Turks had been driven out of the Wadi position, and continued: "We are now the 15th January, that is to say, the date which you laid down in December as being hazardous to expect me to hold out beyond. I only shut myself up at Kut on the distinct understanding that I was relieved in a month and we have now been six weeks . . . . It seems to me that Nur-ud-Din is fighting delaying actions in order to let expected reinforcements arrive." That same night General Aylmer got another telegram from General Townshend saying that the enemy was turning the siege into a blockade investment, that the last three or four nights had been quiet and that there were very few enemy troops left opposite him on the right bank. They had seen hostile cavalry in observation all day on the left bank at Es Sinn, a large enemy camp on the right bank near Dujaila, and an enemy attempt to make a *mahaila* bridge over the Hai about 4,500 yards from the Tigris.

The weather on the 16th January continued to be very bad with gales of wind and heavy rain. In the morning, in reply to General Townshend's telegram of the previous day, General Aylmer said that it was his intention to advance by both banks of the river; he mentioned the delaying effect of the weather and assured General Townshend that everything possible was being done to effect his relief. At the same time, General

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Bridge of Boats over the Tigris, broken up by storm; January 1916.

Aylmer pointed out that owing to the 6,000 casualties incurred in the engagements of the 7th and 13th, his fighting strength was only about 9,000. That evening, General Townshend telegraphed that the enemy had been seen doing much digging and wiring on entrenchments on the left bank some 4,500 yards downstream of Kut fort, that a German general had been seen inspecting the enemy's defences north of the fort, and that there were 21 days' British and 18 days' Indian rations remaining in Kut.

Work on the Tigris bridge near the Wadi was carried out during the day under considerable difficulties, and the bridge was nearing completion when a steamer drifted into it and carried away a considerable portion. Consequently, the 1/9th Gurkhas, completing the three battalions of which the 7th Brigade was then composed, had to be ferried across to join the force on the right bank of the Tigris. Further trouble was caused by the Wadi coming down in flood and demolishing the bridge over that stream ; but the pontoons and superstructure were saved and next day two bridges were erected there.

Two air reconnaissances, carried out during the morning of the 17th, disclosed considerable elaboration and improvement of the Hanna defile defences, including the erection of a wire entanglement along the whole front of the Turkish line. The 7th Division also reconnoitred the enemy's position and, pushing forward, dug themselves in nearer to the enemy.

The same inclement weather continued throughout the 17th, but in spite of it the sappers strove strenuously at the bridge across the Tigris. They had just completed it about 7 p.m., when three of its component *danaks* sank, carrying a portion of the bridge downstream. In spite of the heavy wind and rain, the weary engineers worked on throughout the night and had almost completed their task when misfortune again overtook them. About 8 a.m. on the 18th, the wind suddenly veered round to the south-west, blowing with still greater force and bringing heavy waves over the boats, with the eventual result that about half the bridge was washed downstream. This portion, fouling several of the ships, had to be dismantled and taken ashore, many of the *danaks* being sunk and much superstructure lost.* All hope of getting a bridge across the Tigris in the immediate future had now to be abandoned.

As far as it is permissible, on the *data* at present available, to hazard an opinion, this failure to construct a bridge across

* It is noteworthy that none of the few pontoons were lost, as they did not sink.

the Tigris contributed greatly to the lack of success in the next few days' operations; as without the bridge the amount of artillery that could be sent over to the right bank was strictly limited. It seems necessary, therefore, to enter here into the reasons which led General Aylmer to continue an immediate advance, necessitating mainly frontal attacks against the Hanna defile entrenchments, which there was every sign that the Turks were strengthening daily with a view to obstinate resistance.

The evacuation of Helles in the Dardanelles by the British force on the 8th January had set free many Turkish troops and, although these particular troops could not reach Mesopotamia for several weeks, all information indicated the early arrival at Kut of other Turkish reinforcements. These were said to consist of from two to five divisions.* The Russians had recently commenced an advance in the Caucasus and their force in North-West Persia about Hamadan also intended to advance, and both these operations might divert some of the Turkish reinforcements; but so far there was no information to indicate this, and the Turks were known to have largely increased their whole army. It was, therefore, not safe to count on any such diversion of force. The necessary operations against the series of Turkish entrenchments between Hanna and Kut were likely to be costly and lengthy; the Turks were evidently entrenching around and below Kut so as to render less likely than ever the chances of successful co-operation by the Kut garrison; and the latest news showed that General Townshend had only sufficient rations to last till the 7th February.

So unpromising did his chances of effecting the relief of Kut by operations on the left bank of the Tigris appear to General Aylmer that, on the night 16th/17th January, he telegraphed to Generals Nixon and Townshend as follows:—

> ". . . . The position of affairs must be frankly faced. The enemy is blocking the entrance of the Wadi–Nukhailat defile with very strong works and, judging of his dispositions within them, they have been designed to resist a heavy bombardment from across the river as well as attack in front. His bivouac shelters seem to indicate that he may have with him the whole 52nd Division and

* General von Gleich in "Vom Balkan nach Baghdad" states that they actually consisted of one cavalry brigade and two divisions. Part of the leading division, i.e., the 2nd, which had fought at Anzac in Gallipoli, reached Kut during February.

two regiments of the 35th and 38th Divisions, but of course I cannot be certain of this.* Emplacements for nineteen guns have been seen, eleven of which are designed to fire across the river. Behind in defile there is a single line of entrenchments through the Y of Sannaiyat† between marsh and river, probably one and a half miles long. Behind, again, is Es Sinn position.

"It is impossible in my opinion to take the first position by a *coup de main* from this side alone without losing half the force. It was my intention to cross the 3rd Division and Cavalry Brigade to right bank directly bridge is finished and thus enfilade enemy's position. Even by this means I do not think that our progress as an entire force can be anything but very slow.

"Information indicates that reinforcements may have begun to arrive at Kut and these may soon amount to a very considerable number. On right bank below Kut at present there do not seem to be at outside more than 2,000 men, and rain is evidently rendering Hai crossing difficult for transport.

"The best plan seems to me for Townshend to cross river during the night, with such able-bodied men as he has got, in the *mahailas* and other river transport available and march well round Es Sinn position (right bank). I would cross about one division and cavalry brigade at same time and march to meet him and bring him back here. The opportunity is now favourable and may cease directly enemy sends troops down right bank, which may be very soon.

"On 20th December Townshend informed me he had fifty *mahailas* besides other river craft. If these still exist it should be about sufficient for his purpose, though he would have to leave sick unable to march and destroy most of his guns and material. If Townshend thinks this possible, I shall issue orders for him to do so."

General Nixon replied at once (i.e., 7.10 a.m. on the 17th January), repeating his answer to General Townshend‡ :—

". . . . I do not in any way agree with your appreciation of the situation or that the same calls for Townshend to

* Kiesling gives the Turkish force as the 35th and 52nd Divisions. The 35th included the remnants of the former 38th Division.

† See trenches shown on Map 17. General Aylmer's reference is to a map which has not been reproduced here.

‡ The whole series of these telegrams were so repeated, and General Townshend repeated his telegrams to both Generals Aylmer and Nixon.

take the extreme step you propose. Only circumstances that could in my opinion justify this course would be demoralisation of your force, which I have no reason to suspect. You have been opposed from Shaikh Saad by 35th, 38th and 52nd Divisions, some gendarmerie and cavalry, totalling rather over 15,000, with at the outside 41 guns, and you have twice defeated them. Townshend has been contained by 45th and 51st Divisions,* totalling possibly 8,000 with 17 guns. Townshend has reported strong column estimated one division and 12 guns retiring to main camp west of Kut. Enemy have further suffered losses estimated by you at 4,500 Shaikh Saad and 2,000 Wadi. You therefore should have between you and Kut not more than 5,000 and possibly 27 guns. The total of your losses should almost have been made good by reinforcing units. Your bridge gives you freedom of manoeuvre.†

"The course you originally proposed, namely, to employ part of your force on right bank, should not only promise success but afford you opportunity of inflicting severe blow on enemy and effecting speedy relief of Townshend.

"I cannot believe that position in front of you can equal in strength those attacked and captured by us in the past, which had been in preparation for four months.

"The course you now propose for Townshend in your telegram under reply would be disastrous from every point of view—to Townshend's force, to the whole of the forces in Mesopotamia and to the Empire, and I cannot sanction it.

"There is no reason to suppose enemy has yet been reinforced by a sixth division and the possibility of its arrival only emphasises necessity for prompt action."

When he sent the above telegram, General Nixon's health had already completely broken down and he was expecting to be relieved in his command within a day or two by General Lake from India. Otherwise he would doubtless have gone upstream to see the situation for himself.

After receipt of the above telegrams from Generals Aylmer and Nixon, General Townshend replied on the 17th assuming that General Aylmer would advance on the right bank with his maximum force, and he remarked that, while he held Kut and so stopped the enemy's steamers, barges, etc., he did not think

* From German and Turkish accounts it appears probable that at this time the 51st Division were on the Tigris below Kut.

† The final failure to bridge the Tigris had not then occurred.

that the Turks could change to the offensive on the left bank against General Aylmer's minimum force. General Townshend went on to show that the transfer of his force across the Tigris would be a lengthy business, but that he would make secret preparations for it, in anticipation of an advance along the right bank by General Aylmer.

Later in the day, General Townshend telegraphed that in the event of General Aylmer's force failing to relieve him—and as he looked on a sortie in force as destruction as soon as daylight came—he would fight on to the last until his ammunition was exhausted.

At 9.30 p.m. on the 17th January General Aylmer answered General Nixon's telegram as follows :—

> "... I understand your telegram to mean that you desire me to get to Kut in such a way as to hold that place together with Townshend at least till his force can be removed entirely. That is, that you do not wish that Townshend's breaking out should form any portion of my plan. If this is so, the plan suggested by Townshend is opposed to your views and in my opinion less likely to succeed than what I suggested, as my remaining opposite Kut while Townshend took several days to get across the river would lead to the Turks assaulting the place when half denuded of troops.
>
> The only way to relieve Townshend without the necessity of his breaking out is for me to force the defile and join hands with him by left bank. This I shall attempt to do by the means already proposed, namely, crossing the river with part of my force, enfilading enemy and then assaulting his position. I have only just succeeded in completing bridge .... The country round is a sea of mud and animals can hardly move. I am using my utmost endeavour to expedite carrying out plans, but it must be recognised that conditions have been extraordinarily unfavourable. A comparison between the works in front of us and those elsewhere is difficult, but these ones cannot be turned—except in a modified manner by enfilade fire from opposite bank.
>
> I have just heard that bridge is broken again."

General Nixon replied to General Aylmer on the 18th saying that his views were that, on arrival of the relieving force at Kut, General Aylmer, in conjunction with General Townshend, should re-establish and hold the position there. He agreed with General Aylmer that General Townshend's plan was not

sound and he considered that any abandonment of Kut with guns and stores would be disastrous to our prestige and quite uncalled for. General Nixon at the same time approved of General Aylmer's plan for an advance with a portion of his force on the right bank and he hoped that conditions would admit of an early start.

With these instructions before him, General Aylmer felt that he had no alternative but to attempt to carry the Hanna position by an assault as early as possible.

On the 19th January General Nixon handed over his command in Mesopotamia to Lieutenant-General Sir P. H. Lake* and sailed from Basra. By his ability, determination and the confidence he inspired in his force—and after overcoming very great difficulties with limited means—General Nixon had achieved unbroken success during his first six months' operations in Mesopotamia ; and this at a period when no other British force in any theatre of war could make the same boast. At the end of this period General Nixon had found himself with his advanced force well on the road to Baghdad and with only the broken remnant of a frequently defeated Turkish force to bar his further progress. He was aware that the capture of Baghdad was deemed to be politically desirable and it appeared to him that he would be to blame if he missed the opportunity which circumstances appeared to offer him. He failed. On the one hand it has been said that his plan was " based on political and military miscalculations and attempted with tired and insufficient forces and inadequate preparations."† On the other hand, there are those who were on the spot and in a position to judge who say that it was only through sheer bad fortune that he failed to achieve his object. It is no concern of this narrative to offer an opinion ; but it may well point out that, as war is not an exact science, no commander has ever achieved great military success without incurring risks and committing mistakes ; that General Nixon had undoubtedly displayed many of the qualities of a great commander ; and that owing to the breakdown of his health at a critical stage he was never given the opportunity to retrieve his failure and re-establish his reputation. As Lord Hardinge told the Mesopotamia Commission, in paying a tribute to General Nixon's work—and Lord Hardinge had greater facilities

* General Lake had been Chief of the General Staff in India and had been in close touch with the operations in Mesopotamia since their inception. He was also well acquainted with the situation in India and the East generally and knew the policy of Government.

† " Mesopotamia Commission Report."

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British Transport Cart in the mud on the left bank of the Tigris : January 1916.

than any other for judging of his work in Mesopotamia :— " It is by men of his grit and stamp . . . . that the British Empire has been built up . . . ."

To return to the situation of General Aylmer's force. On the 18th January the bad weather conditions continued ; the Wadi flood increased and carried away the two bridges over it ;* air reconnaissance was impracticable ; and the destruction of the bridge over the Tigris prevented the projected crossing to the right bank of the greater part of the force allotted for that purpose. The ground was everywhere deep in mud as the result of the continuous rain, and its effect on movements and operations is difficult to describe adequately. General Aylmer had once more to postpone his advance and thus gave further time to the Turks to improve their defences.

During the 17th and subsequent night, the 35th and 19th Brigades had advanced their line and dug themselves in about a thousand yards from the enemy's main trenches, the 35th Brigade being only about two hundred yards from his advanced piquets ; and on the night of the 18th/19th these two brigades made a further short advance, encountering heavy hostile fire which prevented their patrols getting far forward. At the same time the 21st Brigade moved up in support and occupied the trenches dug the previous night by the 19th and 35th Brigades ; and a few troops, mainly artillery, were ferried with difficulty across to the right bank of the Tigris.

The weather cleared on the 19th January and an air reconnaissance at 10.15 a.m. reported that the Turks had strengthened their second position on the left bank of the Tigris at Sannaiyat. By this time the troops on the right bank, under General Keary, including those it had been possible to ferry across, consisted of two squadrons 33rd Cavalry, one section " S " Battery, R.H.A., the 23rd Mountain Battery (four guns) and the 7th Infantry Brigade, whose three Indian battalions had been joined that morning by two companies of the 1/Manchester Regiment just arrived from Basra ; and some more artillery were in the process of crossing. This force advanced during the day up the right bank to establish themselves in positions from which to enfilade the Turkish main position on the left bank. They encountered no enemy opposition on the right bank,† but on reaching the vicinity of Arab Village‡ they came under heavy rifle fire from the left bank.

* On the 19th a new bridge of nine spans was constructed over the Wadi.
† Enemy holding Arab Village withdrew before the British advance.
‡ See Map 16.

from which the 7th Brigade suffered some thirty casualties.

It was General Aylmer's intention to bombard the Turkish main position during the 20th by day and night and on the 21st to carry out an assault, of which the main effort would be directed against the Turkish right near the river. Orders were consequently issued for this bombardment to be carried out throughout the whole of the 20th, from 9 a.m. till dusk, followed by bursts of heavy fire during the night of the 20th/21st. The maximum amount of ammunition was to be employed, consistent with the retention of sufficient shells to allow of further anticipated fighting before Kut could be reached after the Turks had been driven out of the Hanna position.*

During the night of the 19th/20th, the 93rd Infantry took up a position on the river bank opposite the Turkish front line on the left bank, while the remainder of the 7th Brigade established outposts south and south-east of Arab Village; and the artillery, reinforced by the 19th Battery of the 9th Brigade, R.F.A., and a section 61st Howitzer Battery, dug themselves into positions from which to enfilade the Turkish left bank trenches. On the left bank the 7th Division advanced their trenches so that their front line was within five to six hundred yards of the enemy position.

On the 20th January the weather was fine though threatening, but the mud had not dried up sufficiently to permit of rapid movement. By this time the Turkish position on the left bank had been strongly entrenched. The front line, consisting of continuous trenches extending for 1,350 yards from river to marsh, was covered by a wire entanglement and supported by a second trench line a few hundred yards in rear. On both flanks, though these were secured against direct assault by the marsh and the Tigris, there were long lengths of trench roughly parallel to the river; and there were reserve positions in rear, with many subsidiary and communicating trenches.

The Tigris had risen some four or five feet during the night and there were dense clouds, which interfered with the British air observation. It seemed clear, however, that the Turks were holding both the position in the Hanna defile and that at Sannaiyat, though indications of a Turkish retirement from the Hanna position had been noticed on that and the previous day. It was not possible to estimate at all accurately

* The amount of ammunition available for replenishment was very limited both in Mesopotamia and India, and on this account orders had been issued by the Commander-in-Chief in India for a very careful husbanding of ammunition.

the strength of the Turkish force in the defile and the intelligence estimates for some days past had been considerably confused by reports from Kut of large hostile bodies moving past there both up and downstream. All attempts on the part of the British, however, to advance on the left bank invariably met with heavy hostile fire.

At 6.30 a.m. on the 20th January General Aylmer issued his orders for the attack on the 21st. At 6.30 a.m. or as soon as it was light enough to see their target, the artillery were to bombard the enemy's first line of trenches for ten minutes and during this bombardment the 7th Division were to advance to within 150 to 200 yards of the enemy trenches if they had not got within that distance during the bombardments of the 20th and the night of the 20th/21st. The bombardment would then lift on to the enemy's second line, also for ten minutes,* the cessation of the bombardment of the enemy's first line being the signal for the 7th Division to assault. Their main attack was to be delivered against the half of the enemy's front nearest the river, the 35th Brigade being directed against the enemy bastion about five hundred yards from the river and the small salient work close to the river bank. The 9th Brigade was to support the main attack under the orders of the commander of the 7th Division.

The 28th Brigade were to form General Reserve under General Aylmer's orders; the Cavalry Brigade were to be in observation on the extreme right of the 7th Division; the 2nd Rajputs were to protect the shipping and the Wadi bridge; and General Aylmer's headquarters would be in the *Mejidieh*, about one and a half miles upstream of the Wadi.

Orders were issued on the 20th to ensure the immediate advance of all vessels and baggage, if the assault was successful.

During the 20th, the artillery bombardment,† in which the guns of the *Cranefly* and *Dragonfly* co-operated, was carried out as arranged under the orders of the Brigadier-General Commanding the Royal Artillery.‡ The results of this bombardment, as estimated by General Aylmer, are shown by his report of that evening to General Nixon :—

> ". . . . From observations made throughout the day from all accessible points, result of bombardment to-day appears to have been effective, but heavy rifle fire has been

* The infantry enfilading fire from the right bank was to conform to this change of target.

† For the approximate position of the different guns, see Map 16.

‡ Brigadier-General L. A. C. Gordon, R.A., had taken up this appointment on the 15th January.

directed on any attempts of our advanced troops to get forward. Wire entanglement is reported to have been completely broken on enemy's right. Aeroplane reconnaissance this afternoon added little to our previous information. Artillery bombardment is being continued at intervals during night and the infantry on left bank will push forward as close to enemy's position as they can . . . . Day has been fine but uncertain. River is still rising."

During the night of the 20th/21st the 7th Division made further progress on the left bank, and by 6 a.m. on the 21st their front was about three hundred yards distant from the enemy's first line trenches. By this time the total available fighting strength of the three infantry brigades of this division was reduced to about 3,700 rifles; General Harvey of the 19th Brigade had been wounded on the 20th; and General Younghusband broke up the 21st Brigade and attached its battalions to the 35th and 19th Brigades. General Norie, of the 21st Brigade, took over command of the 19th Brigade, which occupied the right, or northern, portion of the British line; and the 35th Brigade held the left portion.

In the front line of the 19th Brigade, whose right was not far from the edge of the marsh, were—from right to left—one company Seaforths, 125th Rifles, 9th Bhopal Infantry and 102nd Grenadiers; in the second line were two companies Seaforths, 28th Punjabis and 92nd Punjabis; and the remaining Seaforth company was between the two lines echeloned to the right.

The 35th Brigade had in front line the 41st Dogras on the right and the Black Watch on the left, each battalion—only about 300 rifles strong—occupying a frontage of two hundred and fifty yards; in second line, one hundred and thirty yards in rear, were the 37th Dogras and 6th Jats, totalling between them about 500 rifles; and in third line, a thousand yards behind the second line, were the 1/5th Buffs and 97th Infantry, with a combined rifle strength of about 450.

Immediately in rear of the third line of the 35th Brigade was the 9th Brigade,* also disposed in three lines. In the first were the 62nd Punjabis (on the right) and 1/4th Hampshire; in the second, the 1/Connaught Rangers†; and in the third line the 107th Pioneers.

The headquarters of the 7th Division, with the 128th Pioneers as divisional reserve, were established near the river

* Major-General R. G. Egerton.
† Arrived from Basra on the 19th January.

bank in rear of the 9th Brigade. Practically the whole of the artillery on the left bank were in different positions in rear of the 9th Brigade,* and on the right rear of their position was the 28th Brigade forming General Aylmer's general reserve and located about two miles east of the Turkish front line trenches. The Cavalry Brigade was on the right flank of the 28th Brigade ; and the 13th Sapper Company, the 2nd Rajputs and the Provisional Battalion were near the Wadi junction.

Of General Keary's troops on the Tigris right bank, the 93rd Infantry with a company of the 1/1st Gurkhas and six machine guns were posted on the river bank opposite the right of the Turkish first line ; twelve field and mountain guns† were in position south-eastward of the 93rd ; and two Gurkha companies with four machine guns were on the river bank on both sides of Arab Village. The two squadrons 33rd Cavalry, supported by two guns of " S " Battery, R.H.A., were near the river bank to the westward of Arab Village ; and the remainder of the 7th Brigade were posted to cover the field and mountain guns from the south-west and south.‡

These dispositions gave General Aylmer for his attack on the left bank 30 guns|| and 21 battalions, providing an available rifle strength of about 7,600.

Owing to the usual morning mist rendering artillery observation impossible, the " zero " hour, at which the artillery bombardment on the 21st was to start, was fixed at 7.45 a.m. instead of the earlier hour indicated in General Aylmer's orders. Under cover of this bombardment the first and second lines of the 35th Brigade§ advanced, progressing about two hundred yards but suffering considerable casualties from the heavy and accurate enemy rifle fire ; and at 7.55 a.m., when the artillery lifted on to the Turkish second line, they dashed to the assault with the utmost gallantry under a destructive Turkish rifle fire. At the same time the third line of the 35th Brigade,¶ which before the " zero " hour had closed to within three hundred yards of their second line, pushed forward and reached our front line trenches. Here, however, all except a few of the 97th, who joined up with the Black Watch in the Turkish

* See Map 16.

† Including two field howitzers.

‡ The 7th Brigade consisted on the 21st January of half battalion 1/Manchester Regiment, 93rd Infantry, 1/1st Gurkhas and 1/9th Gurkhas. The remaining half battalion Manchesters did not arrive from Basra till the 22nd.

|| Thirty-two guns, if two guns with the Cavalry Brigade are included.

§ Black Watch, 41st and 37th Dogras and 6th Jats.

¶ 1/5th Buffs and 97th Infantry.

trenches, were definitely checked by the heavy Turkish rifle fire.

Some of the Dogras managed to reach the enemy's wire entanglement, to find that it still proved a formidable obstacle ; and only a few of them reached the Turkish trenches. From these the Turks, fighting fiercely, soon drove them back and then, as reinforcements failed to reach them, they were forced back to their own front line trench.

The Black Watch and Jats were more successful. The wire entanglement on their front had been well destroyed and they penetrated into the Turkish position, capturing about one hundred and fifty yards' length of the first line trench with two Turkish machine guns and a few prisoners. But their number was very small, consisting only of about fifty officers and men of the Black Watch and ten of the 6th Jats. The Turkish trench was six to seven feet deep, with loopholed parapet and a parados some three feet high ; and a deep communication trench ran back along the river bank to the second line. Steps were at once taken to consolidate the captured portion of trench, and the only one of the captured machine guns that could be got to work was manned by the Black Watch, while the communication trench was blocked and held by the party of the 6th Jats.

In the meantime, the 9th Brigade had been trying to push in to the support of the 35th Brigade. General Egerton, having heard from General Rice that the third line of the 35th Brigade was pushing forward before " zero " hour, ordered his leading battalion to advance at " zero " hour in close support of the 35th Brigade. The 62nd Punjabis, on the right of his first line, were to press forward at about two hundred and fifty yards' distance from the Tigris, with the 1/4th Hampshire moving slightly to their left rear. The 1/Connaught Rangers were to move up to the trench line vacated by the 62nd Punjabis and the 107th Pioneers were to remain in reserve. At 8 a.m. the Connaughts were sent forward to support the 62nd, and the 107th occupied the trenches vacated by the Connaughts.

The leading battalions of this brigade encountered heavy fire as soon as they began their advance and suffered severe casualties. The 62nd Punjabis, losing touch with the 35th Brigade, and missing their direction,* got too far to their right, and losing most of their British and Indian officers, were

* This seems to have been due to the bend in the Tigris.

unable to rectify their position or maintain their advance. The 1/4th Hampshire gradually continued to advance despite heavy casualties, the remnant of them eventually joining up on the right of the 35th Brigade, though a few men succeeded in joining the party of the Black Watch in the captured position.

The Connaught Rangers, following in rear of the 62nd Punjabis, also suffered heavy casualties ; but they advanced up to and beyond the 62nd and a part of them reached the firing line on the right of the 35th Brigade.

Thus, all attempts to push forward to support and reinforce the party in the captured position failed. This small body of men from the Black Watch and other battalions held on with stern determination for over an hour. Then the Turks developed a strong counter-attack, advancing simultaneously against the British left by the communication trench and against their right, and the survivors of the British garrison, overwhelmed by numbers, were forced to retire to their original front line trench.

Communication back from the front of the 35th Brigade had broken down almost at once and Generals Younghusband and Aylmer were largely dependent on reports from the right bank to show what was happening. A message from the right bank, sent at 8.10 a.m., reported the enemy retiring in good order, and another sent half an hour later reported that our infantry on our left had taken the Turkish trenches and were moving along the river bank. At 8.30 a.m. General Younghusband reported that the 19th Brigade attack was progressing without a check and that the enemy artillery had ceased to fire ; but twenty minutes later he reported that the 19th Brigade was checked ; and immediately afterwards he reported that three battalions of the 9th Brigade* were supporting the 35th Brigade, i.e., one battalion was still in reserve. Thus, it seemed to General Aylmer that his attack was meeting with success and he ordered his General Reserve (28th Brigade) to move half a mile to their front and the Cavalry Brigade also to advance.

Meanwhile, the 19th Brigade had commenced their advance as ordered, but failed to make much real progress, for, though they eventually got within a hundred yards of the hostile trenches, they could advance no further.

At 9 a.m. General Younghusband moved his headquarters forward ; at 9.20 he reported no news from the 35th Brigade,

* He was then unaware that they had missed their direction and had got too far to the right.

but that they were apparently progressing and that he had ordered one of his field batteries to advance ; and at 9.35 a.m., in answer to a query sent by General Aylmer at 9.10 a.m., asking whether the 19th or 35th Brigades were yet in the enemy's trenches, he said that no definite information of the situation could be obtained, but that it was believed that the 35th Brigade were in the Turkish trenches, that our left attack was advancing and that the 19th Brigade had been checked.

About 9.30 a.m. General Aylmer received two reports from General Keary, sent off at 8.50 and 9, which said that two battalions of Turkish reinforcements were advancing towards the Turkish left, that there were no further signs of British success on the left bank and that some enemy guns were still in action. General Aylmer came to the conclusion from these and other reports that the Turks were preparing a counter-attack on their left. Whether they would launch this at the flank of the 35th Brigade inside the Turkish position, as General Aylmer believed them to be, or against the 19th Brigade was of course uncertain. In either case it seemed to General Aylmer that his best course was to reinforce the 19th Brigade to enable them to meet and defeat the Turkish counter-attack in whichever course it took. Accordingly at 9.45 a.m. he ordered the 28th Brigade, less one battalion, to support the right flank of the 19th Brigade and instructed General Younghusband to afford this brigade further artillery support.

About 10.15 a.m. General Younghusband reported to General Aylmer that the Black Watch had got into the Turkish redoubt but had been bombed out of it and obliged to fall back ; that the 35th Brigade seemed to be occupying our advanced trenches and that the 9th Brigade supporting them had pushed in all their units. At the same time General Aylmer received a report from General Keary, sent off at 10 a.m. showing that the Turks who had at first retired were then advancing again with reinforcements.

At 11.15 a.m. General Aylmer, realising that the whole attack was definitely checked, told General Younghusband to consider the advisability of renewing the artillery bombardment. This message crossed one from General Younghusband asking that the 28th Brigade, which was then near the 19th Brigade position, should be ordered to press their attack. General Aylmer replied that no attack should take place till after the next bombardment and half an hour later he issued orders that only two of the 28th Brigade battalions were to take part in the attack, one battalion being kept in hand by

General Kemball and one battalion still to remain in general reserve. In the meantime General Younghusband had issued orders to his firing line to maintain the ground gained and that a fresh attack was to be pressed home at 1 p.m. on the conclusion of a ten minutes' intense artillery bombardment, which was to commence at 12.50 p.m.

At this stage, to add to the British difficulties, bad weather once again came on. It began to blow and to rain heavily at about 11.30 a.m. and this continued throughout the day and the following night. The whole area was soon transformed into a morass of deep and glutinous mud, which almost paralysed movement and intercommunication. There had hitherto been fair telephonic communication between divisional and brigade headquarters, although there was none between brigade headquarters and units ; but now telephonic communication between divisional and brigade headquarters also broke down and all attempts at mending the lines afforded only temporary relief. In consequence all messages had to be sent by hand and, as casualties among the orderlies were numerous, there was no certainty of messages reaching their destination. At 12.50 p.m. the artillery bombardment took place ; but it had no great effect. The field guns had moved forward, but the impossibility of keeping up efficient communication prevented effective ranging. At 1 p.m. the infantry assault was started all along the line, but the men, soaked and numbed by the biting gale, were unable to attain any pace in the mud, which in places was knee-deep ; and real progress was found impossible. On the right, the 51st and 53rd Sikhs of the 28th Brigade, delayed in their advance by the weather conditions, pushed forward steadily, but did not arrive in time to join the 19th Brigade in assaulting at 1 p.m. Moreover, when they reached the firing line there was no room for them in the 19th Brigade front trenches, so they had to lie down in the support trenches without firing. A renewed assault over the almost impassable mud against an undamaged line of wire entanglement was found impracticable ; and at 1.15 p.m. General Younghusband reported that the attack was held up and could make no progress.

At about 2.30 p.m. General Aylmer heard from General Younghusband, in answer to a query as to what units he still had in reserve, that all his infantry were deeply committed with the exception of the Leicestershire (28th Brigade reserve), 107th Pioneers (9th Brigade reserve), 128th Pioneers and 56th Rifles (7th Divisional reserve).

At 3.30 p.m., General Aylmer's senior General Staff Officer (Brigadier-General H. H. Austin) arrived at the 7th Division headquarters,* where he held a consultation with General Younghusband. Under the impression that General Austin had authority to approve of his proposed action, General Younghusband decided to withdraw his front line and organise a defensive line in the trenches that had been occupied prior to the artillery bombardment of the 20th. In General Younghusband's opinion the condition of the ground and the weather, the heavy casualties, the confusion of units and the state of the men—soaked and numbed with cold—made a further attack impossible and rendered it both inadvisable to maintain the forward position and preferable to withdraw to where reorganisation would be possible for a fresh effort when conditions improved.†

General Younghusband accordingly issued orders for his guns to retire to their original positions and for his infantry firing line to disengage and withdraw to a defensive line in the former trenches about thirteen hundred yards from the Turkish position. These movements were to commence as soon as it was dark and were to be as deliberate as possible to allow of every endeavour being made to bring in the wounded.

At 4.20 p.m., a copy of these orders by General Younghusband reached General Aylmer, who totally disapproved of them. With four practically intact battalions still in hand on the left bank,‡ General Aylmer considered it premature to give up the positions which had been so hardly won. He accordingly at once ordered General Younghusband to cancel these orders; and an hour later he sent General Younghusband further instructions to consolidate the positions gained in preparation for a further effort to be made the next day. But he was too late. General Younghusband sent out messages to all brigades cancelling the orders for withdrawal, but owing to the imperfect communications these either did not reach their destinations at all or were received after the withdrawal had been carried out. At 7 p.m. General Younghusband informed General Aylmer

* General Aylmer had sent General Austin to ascertain the exact state of affairs, i.e., what General Younghusband considered could or could not be done and, if a withdrawal should prove necessary, in what manner it could best be carried out.

† General Austin had no authority to sanction any proposal General Younghusband might make, and did not realise that his discussion regarding the withdrawal might be taken by General Younghusband as implying sanction.

‡ He also intended to bring over the half battalion Manchester Regiment from the right bank to reinforce the left bank force.

of this, and that, therefore, plans for the next day should be based on the supposition that the withdrawal had taken place.

The Turks made no attempt to interfere with the withdrawal or to follow it up. One of General Younghusband's staff officers left divisional headquarters to visit all brigades to explain the situation and to ascertain the position, strength and condition of units ; and it took him over five hours to perform the task. He found that the troops were in the positions assigned to them, except that certain battalions had become so scattered and had lost so heavily that, owing to the breaking down of communications, they had not all been collected. The men, drenched and physically tired out, passed a miserable night in their water-logged muddy trenches under the continuous rain and in the cold, which was so intense that the marsh froze when the wind dropped. A large proportion of the men's rifles had become clogged with mud and temporarily useless ; and the shadow of a costly failure hung over everyone. But the staff officer reported that the general *moral* of the men remained good, though all brigade commanders were unanimously of opinion that any attack on the 22nd January by the units engaged that day (21st) was out of the question.

Until the Turkish account of this fight is available it will probably be difficult to judge the effect on the Turkish trenches of the fire from General Keary's force on the right bank, but it does not appear to have been great. During the morning of the 21st the two guns of " S " Battery, R.H.A., were reported to have fired with effect on advancing Turkish reinforcements ; but about 11 a.m. the Tigris began to overflow its bank above Arab Village, rapidly forming a wide stream which extended for some two miles to the southward.* This forced the cavalry and horse artillery guns to withdraw.

At dusk General Keary withdrew all his infantry from the river bank except one company 93rd Infantry ; and, to cover his guns and his bivouac, took up a line of outposts which extended from Arab Village to the mud fort. His casualties during the day had totalled twenty-nine.

General Aylmer put the strength of the Turkish force opposed to him at 9,000 infantry and 26 guns and he estimated their casualties at two thousand.

The British casualties amounted to 2,741, including 78 British officers.† The exceedingly heavy proportion of casualties

* It is said that the Turks caused this inundation by cutting the river bank.

† For detail of some of these, with the approximate strength of some of the units on the morning of the 21st January, see Appendix XVI.

in some battalions, amounting to between fifty and ninety per cent., is some indication of the stern determination and gallantry with which the British and Indian infantrymen strove to attain their objective.

The wounded once again suffered terribly. As many as possible were collected during the withdrawal, but the rain and the darkness made the work very difficult and some of the wounded were lying too close to the enemy's trenches. Consequently arrangements were made next day with the Turks for a six hours' armistice to bring in wounded and to bury the dead.* But few wounded, however, remained. Many of those near the Turkish trenches had been taken away by the Turks and others had died from exposure.† The ships were two miles back and the evacuation to them of the wounded through the rain and mud was a very difficult task; and even when the ships were reached the medical arrangements proved insufficient.

During the 21st January General Aylmer sent various messages to Generals Lake and Townshend indicating the progress of the fight. At 12.30 p.m. he sent a message describing the failure up to that time and saying that the enemy was apparently receiving reinforcements. In reply to this General Townshend telegraphed at 3.55 p.m. saying that his trenches had been invaded by water and that it seemed possible that this might oblige him to evacuate his first and middle lines of trenches and also the fort. He mentioned, however, that the Turks were, for the same reason, evacuating all their front line trenches. He added that he would from that day put his troops on half rations as he had only fourteen days full rations left. General Townshend's reasons for not putting his garrison on half rations before this have already been referred to in a previous chapter. Briefly speaking he desired to keep his men fit for future operations. On his part, to ensure success, General Aylmer always looked for a supreme effort from the Kut garrison to co-operate with him, at a time to be selected by him. From the commencement of his relief operations he understood that the *moral* of a part of the garrison was not good; and their physical condition was not likely to improve during the investment. He felt, there-

* Kiesling says that this armistice was of great benefit to the Turks as giving them time to replenish their ammunition, which had been completely used up in the previous day's fighting.

† A considerable number of unwounded men went sick and several died as the result of the cold and exposure experienced on the 21st/22nd January.

fore, that if he ordered them to be placed on half rations there would be little chance of their being able to co-operate effectively with him when required to do so.

At 5.40 p.m.* General Aylmer telegraphed to General Townshend that his two assaults had been unsuccessful but that he would renew the attack next day, though it appeared rather a forlorn hope and his losses had been very heavy. He said that the only way in which General Townshend could help him was to make a sortie on a large scale and endeavour to defeat the enemy in front of him, retiring again to Kut. Such a success would probably induce the Turks to withdraw from the Hanna defile, where they had undoubtedly suffered heavy loss. General Aylmer concluded by asking General Townshend, if he could carry this out, to do it soon.

That night General Aylmer received the following telegram from General Lake :—

> "I fully realise the difficulty of your task. Deeply regret your losses and suffering which wounded must necessarily undergo under present climatic conditions. Hope you will continue to press attack when circumstances admit and I am confident of successful result."

At 1.10 a.m. on the night of the 21st/22nd General Aylmer telegraphed to Generals Lake and Townshend that, owing to the effect of the rain and the retirement of General Younghusband's front line, he was forced to abandon his intention of renewing the attack next day. At 10.20 a.m. on the 22nd January General Aylmer again telegraphed confirming the reverse and saying that the condition of his men prohibited an advance for the present. The weather was atrocious and the floods were increasing. Soon after this was despatched, General Aylmer heard from General Lake pointing out that as the enemy's base for supplies and munitions was twenty miles distant they must be in a worse condition than the British and directing him to hang on and not lose touch, as any retrogade Turkish movement should give him an opportunity to open the road to Kut. He also heard that morning from General Townshend saying that on half rations he could last for twenty-seven days more. At 2.25 p.m. General Aylmer replied to Generals Lake and Townshend saying that he intended to hold on, but that there was no indication of any enemy retirement.

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* After he had received General Townshend's telegram quoted above.

CHAPTER XXII.

OPERATIONS UP TO THE END OF FEBRUARY 1916.

GENERAL LAKE, as Chief of the General Staff in India, had corresponded with General Nixon and had seen most of his official telegrams and reports. Consequently, on arrival at Basra, he was well conversant with the general military situation and the reasons which called for the early relief of Kut. But it was not long before he realised—as did all new-comers to Mesopotamia—that hitherto he had not properly appreciated the great natural difficulties of campaigning in this extraordinary country; nor how inadequately his force was equipped to meet these difficulties.

Although it will be necessary to summarise much that has been said before, it seems advisable to portray the situation as it appeared to General Lake a few days after his arrival. General Aylmer was carrying on operations with an improvised staff, makeshift organisation and inadequate transport, medical and other resources; in fact, under such conditions that only an apparently imperative necessity had justified his attempting offensive operations. These, moreover, had been rendered more difficult by the persistent bad weather, which, besides hampering all movements and destroying communications, had given the enemy more time to improve his defences and, by increasing General Aylmer's casualties,* had reduced his slight numerical superiority over the enemy. Further, for the trench warfare in which they were engaged, General Aylmer's force was ill-equipped and there was no way of remedying the deficiency. India had not the means of doing so, and, as the output of war material was still insufficient for their own requirements elsewhere, the War Office were also unable to assist. In consequence General Aylmer's troops had no trench mortars, no heavy howitzers and but few light ones, no heavy guns or Very lights and a limited number of machine guns.† The

* The cold, wet and mud increased the casualties, not only through the longer exposure it imposed on the attacking infantry at decisive ranges, but also by its effect on the health of both wounded and unwounded men.

† The first trench mortars reached Basra in April 1916; the 5-inch howitzers with the so-called heavy batteries were of old pattern and were deficient in range and accuracy; the first 6-inch howitzer and 60-pounders did not reach the country till March 1916, and no Very lights came till after the fall of Kut. The amount of ammunition of all kinds was also very limited.

bridging train was mainly a local improvisation and the country boats of which it was largely composed were unreliable and too heavy for transport overland. The force was very short of aircraft and there were no balloons for observation of fire.

The main operations were taking place some two hundred and fifty miles by river from Basra and their successful conduct was much impeded by the shortage of river transport, additions to which were not arriving as quickly as had been anticipated. Further, when they did arrive, besides requiring considerable overhaul after their oversea voyage, many of them were without expert and reliable crews, a deficiency it was impossible to make good in Mesopotamia. As an instance of how much this transport factor affected the successful issue of the operations, there were at Basra on the 21st January—the day of the unsuccessful attack on Hanna—reinforcements of some 10,000 infantry and 12 guns which could not be sent upstream owing to lack of shipping.* To send more of them by land than was being done was impracticable, and the rains and floods rendered the track up the Tigris impassable for days at a time ; for the track was at this time still below flood level and only the larger waterways along it had been roughly bridged with any material available.

Other disadvantages of the shortage of river craft were that it rendered the provision at the front of adequate supplies and stores of all kinds a most difficult matter† ; it prevented the rapid transfer of troops from one bank of the river to the other for operation purposes ; and it so limited the amount of land transport which could be sent to General Aylmer's force as to tie him to the immediate vicinity of the river.

Reinforcements and stores were arriving at Basra faster than they could be sent upstream ; accommodation ashore was limited ; there was a shortage of labour ; and the staff of the Principal Marine Transport Officer was too small ; with the result that the congestion at the port was very great.

One of the first steps taken by General Lake was to sanction a large extension at Maqil, orders being given for the immediate protection from flood of a large area there by banks, the raising of a broad wharf and the construction of additional landing places, where ships could lie alongside.

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* Though shipping might have been provided for the transport of the troops, it was insufficient to keep them supplied at the front.

† As it was, General Aylmer was gradually consuming his reserves, previously accumulated and based on a time-table which had not been fulfilled.

The provision of additional accommodation at Basra was rendered difficult by the state of the ground, which owing to the recent rain was everywhere ankle deep in mud or water. General Lake, describing to the Mesopotamia Commission a visit he made to the camp at Makina Masus,* says that he had to walk there as even after two days without rain riding was impracticable. Wheeled transport could not move in the mud; and, as he said, the British soldier, with his usual felicity of expression, had aptly translated the name of the site into "Muck in the Marshes." Moreover, in less than two months' time the flood season was due and would make matters very much worse.

Roads in the Basra area, above flood level and with bridges over the many large canals high enough to allow *mahailas* to pass beneath them, were of earth only and few and far between; and many more would be required to connect landing places, stores, depots, camps and hospitals. For the traffic these roads would have to support, metalling would be required; but stone for metalling was quite unprocurable locally.

The provision of accommodation and roads and the protection of the area from floods were the most urgent works, and orders were issued for these to be expedited immediately. They included an embankment 9 miles long, 10 feet high and 30 feet wide at the base, extending from Maqil to near Shaiba, and the total lengths in the Basra area amounted to some twenty-four miles.†

The labour question in Mesopotamia was always a difficult one. The local Arabs were unreliable and, although some Persian labour was imported with successful results, the numbers obtainable were limited. There were political objections to bringing large numbers of Indian labourers into the country and, when the seriousness of the situation overcame these objections, it was found that Indians themselves were much averse to going to Mesopotamia, and large numbers of them refused to embark at the last moment. In addition to retarding all works, this labour shortage had the further result of affecting the battle efficiency of the troops in Mesopotamia; for soldiers there had to be employed in large numbers on the most urgent works, and, as many of them had only a few months' service, their necessary military training was much interfered with.

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* In the Basra area.

† The greater part of them were constructed by April.

Immediately after his arrival, General Lake inspected all the hospitals at Basra. He found that, though the conditions were not good, they were not bad according to previous standards; and from his conversations with the patients he did not gather, as he afterwards ascertained to have been the case, that they had been badly cared for up river. There was too little hospital accommodation and the patients were consequently too crowded, but the engineers were hard at work in rectifying this. After his visits General Lake came away with the impression, as he reported that day to Sir Beauchamp Duff, that the medical services were coping not unsuccessfully with very difficult conditions.

Another question that General Lake went into on his arrival was the possibility of making a railway up the Tigris. As ocean-going steamers could not get up to Qurna, railway bridges would be required over the Euphrates at Kurmat Ali and Qurna and he ascertained that each of these would take six months to construct. Moreover, in addition to the labour shortage, there was then no accommodation above flood level at Basra or Maqil for railway material, nor were there the necessary facilities for landing heavy railway stores. As time was such an important factor, all that could be thought of for the moment was light railway material for the work of the port itself and for a railway to Zubair.*

From the beginning of December General Nixon and his staff had been working hard at the improvement of the base and port of Basra, but much remained to be done. General Nixon's illness, preventing his energetic personal supervision of, and attention to, the task, had been undoubtedly a drawback.

In the previous autumn General Nixon had asked India to send him an expert in river conservancy and dredger work and, in answer to this request, the Government of India had sent Sir George Buchanan as Director-General of Port Administration and River Conservancy. Sir George, who had many years' experience as head of the port administration of Rangoon, arrived at Basra on the 1st January 1916. But there was some doubt as to the exact scope of his duties and General Nixon only asked him to carry out survey, conservancy and dredging work; and, although Generals Nixon and Lake frequently asked and obtained Sir George Buchanan's advice

* Such light material was despatched from India in February in accordance with General Lake's demands.

on other matters concerning the port, its actual administration was left in the hands of the Principal Marine Transport Officer, Captain Huddleston of the Royal Indian Marine.

General Lake was anxious to go up the Tigris as soon as possible to see conditions at the front and to confer with General Aylmer; this anxiety was all the greater after he had received news on the 22nd of the repulse at Hanna; and he arranged to leave Basra on the 24th January.*

On the 23rd General Townshend telegraphed to Generals Aylmer and Lake giving three possible courses open to him in the event of there being any doubt as to General Aylmer's ability to effect the relief of Kut. These courses were:—

(*a*) To attempt to break out of Kut by crossing the Tigris to the right bank and then to make straight for Shaikh Saad, being met half-way if possible by a column sent by General Aylmer.

(*b*) To hold Kut to the last.

(*c*) To open negotiations with the enemy for surrender.

To this General Lake replied the same night that he still hoped to effect the relief of Kut, but would be better able to express a definite opinion after he had reached General Aylmer's headquarters about the 28th; that in any case the consideration of alternative (*b*) was then unnecessary, while (*c*) was out of the question; but that General Townshend should secretly prepare plans so that alternative (*a*) could be carried into effect in case of extremity.

This reply crossed a telegram on the subject from General Aylmer, who, after expressing the opinion that he would be unable to effect the entire relief of the Kut garrison, even after the arrival of the reinforcements then on their way up the Tigris, gave it as his deliberate opinion formed after the gravest consideration that the best course would be to adopt Townshend's alternative plan (*a*) as suggested originally by General Aylmer, but vetoed by General Nixon.†

The whole situation, however, assumed a new aspect on the receipt of the following telegram sent by General Townshend at 2 p.m. on the 24th January: "I have 22 days' food left now, but by collecting all the *atta*‡ in the town and eating up the horses, we can last out much longer." He followed this

* His first intention had been to go up on the 22nd, but a storm had wrecked the land telegraph between Basra and Amara and, as at that critical stage he could not cut himself off from direct communication for some two days, he had to postpone his departure.

† See Chapter XXI, pp. 261–2.

‡ Coarsely ground flour.

telegram up on that and the next day with further telegrams giving details of additional supplies he had found and announcing his intention of utilising his 3,000 horses and mules as food.* On the 25th he estimated that he had supplies for 84 more days and he thought that there was little chance of the Turks attempting an assault on him, a chance which would, moreover, grow less as the annual floods were due in a few weeks' time.

General Aylmer's views on receipt of this information are given in his telegram, sent on the night 25th/26th January, to Generals Lake and Townshend :—

> " It must be acknowledged that Townshend's telegrams throw a completely new light on the situation. I am delighted that his food supplies are now found much better than I could know from previous telegrams, which pointed to 17th February as date to which he could subsist on half rations. I quite recognise that there are other factors besides food with which he may have to contend in his splendid defence, but this new information, had it been communicated to me before, would have certainly modified much of what I have unsuccessfully attempted to do and what I have proposed. I certainly no longer desire to adopt plan (*a*)† . . . . "

In reply to this, General Townshend telegraphed :—

> " I knew the Arabs in Kut town, some 6,000 souls, had plenty of food and that considerable supplies were in hands of merchants, as Kut is a big trading centre. We have been purchasing them for some time past, but with this population—hostile to us and friendly to the Turks—I have had anxiety and allotted large numbers of military police with night patrolling in consequence. I was not anxious to search for grain, having already searched them for arms, and until relief was in grave doubt had no reason to take over their grain. I have now commandeered everything and my Supply and Transport officers ration Arabs like troops and Arabs are quite content. Hence I had not brought forward supply question before . . . . "

In the meantime, the situation in Mesopotamia had been receiving anxious attention in England as well as in India. Lord Hardinge, in his private weekly letters to Mr. Chamberlain

* He said that he had not felt justified in doing this till he was told that there was no hope of relief.

† See p. 282.

written before the fight at Shaikh Saad, said that he felt no anxiety as to General Townshend's safety at Kut. The halt there had been voluntary and deliberate on Generals Nixon's and Townshend's parts and till quite recently General Townshend had only a slightly superior force of Turks against and round him. In fact Lord Hardinge deprecated the use of the terms "besieged," "relief," and so forth, as they appeared to him to give an entirely false colour to the position at Kut. On the other hand, the General Staff in India, in their appreciation of 3rd/5th January, were so uncertain of the outcome that they considered it impracticable to offer an opinion as to the future course of events until General Aylmer's operations should have developed; and they found the passive attitude adopted by General Townshend difficult to understand. Lord Hardinge, however, appears to have been under a misapprehension regarding both the number of additional river craft which had actually reached Basra and the whole transport situation in Mesopotamia. For, in his letter of the 7th January, he says that, though the shortage of river transport had at one time caused anxiety, they had managed in one way or another to tap sources in India and Burma which had produced sufficient, if makeshift, expedients to enable General Nixon to concentrate the force which began its advance from Ali Gharbi on the 4th January.

The extent of the Turkish resistance at Shaikh Saad and the heavy casualties incurred there by General Aylmer's force altered Lord Hardinge's views and increased Mr. Chamberlain's anxiety as to what was in front of General Aylmer before he could join hands with General Townshend. The situation in Mesopotamia was discussed at a meeting of the War Committee of the Cabinet on the 13th January. As a result the Secretary of State for India telegraphed next day to the Viceroy proposing that India should at once prepare three more infantry brigades for service in Mesopotamia, on the understanding that —in addition to the twelve garrison battalions already promised to take the place in India of the 34th, 35th and 36th Brigades sent from there to Mesopotamia—the War Office would detail twelve more battalions (including eight Indian battalions from Egypt) for early despatch to India. This proposal was agreed to on the 17th January by the Viceroy, who said that the three brigades would be despatched to Mesopotamia as soon as their reliefs arrived in India.*

* On the 25th January General Lake was told by India that the 37th, 41st and 42nd Brigades were being held ready for this purpose.

On the 13th January the Chief of the Imperial General Staff warned the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief in Egypt that it might be necessary to despatch a division from there to Mesopotamia.* The feeling at the War Office at this time, owing to the information then available regarding the supplies in Kut, was that the issue would be settled one way or the other before reinforcements from Egypt could reach the front in Mesopotamia.

News of the repulse on the 21st January at Hanna increased the anxiety in England, and at a meeting of the War Committee on the 26th it was decided that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff should prepare a detailed appreciation of the military situation in Mesopotamia; that the Secretary of State for War should examine the question of a change in the existing system of control of the operations in Mesopotamia; and, on the advice of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, that the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief in Egypt should be ordered to prepare a division for despatch to Mesopotamia. The General Staff at the War Office had been informed on the 22nd January that supplies in Kut would last till the 17th February; on the 27th January they heard that General Townshend could make his food supplies last for some time after that date; but it was not until the 7th February that they learnt that the supplies could be made to last until the 17th April.

On the 26th January, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff wired to the Commander-in-Chief in India asking him to telegraph, for the information of the War Committee, his views of the military situation in Mesopotamia and also to answer certain detailed questions.† Sir Beauchamp Duff replied next day. He estimated the Turkish strength at and below Baghdad at five divisions (possibly 32,000 men and 50 guns), with perhaps another division at Khaniqin. These numbers the Turks might be able to increase by the beginning of March to a total of some 80,000 men and 132 guns. By the 7th February General Aylmer's force should amount to 19 squadrons, 35 battalions and 74 guns, and by the middle of March Sir Beauchamp Duff hoped that the three additional brigades from India would also have arrived. Thus, if by that time Kut had been relieved, General Lake should be able to

* When the troops from Gallipoli reached Egypt during January, it was seen that it might be possible to spare troops from there for Mesopotamia.

† This telegram, showing the details asked for, and the replies of the Commander-in-Chief in India, are given in full in Appendix XVII.

concentrate on the Tigris a force of 45,000 rifles, 2,500 sabres and 120 guns; though, if Kut had fallen, this total would be only 36,000 rifles, 2,500 sabres and 86 guns.

After stating that the check to General Aylmer's force on the 21st January had prejudiced the chances of an early relief of Kut, the capture of which was doubtless the Turks' immediate object, General Duff went on to discuss the possible future plans of the Turks, whether they captured Kut or not. They might continue operations against us or they might secure Baghdad against us whilst operating against the Russians with a view to penetrating into Persia.

After dealing briefly with the main factors affecting these alternatives, General Duff said that it was necessary to recognise that in neither case should we be in a position to undertake an advance on Baghdad in the near future.

Were Kut to be captured, General Duff gave the main considerations which would affect our future action and he concluded that Kut was the key to our position on the Tigris, that the best time for a Russian offensive against Khaniqin was at once, and that we ought, if Kut were lost, to hold a point on the Tigris as high up the river as possible until the situation developed and showed whether we ought to advance, hold our ground, or withdraw.

It is noteworthy that, when this telegram was sent, though Sir Beauchamp Duff was aware that General Townshend's supplies would last him for some time after the 17th February, he had not heard that they would last till April.

The situation in Mesopotamia was again considered by the War Committee of the Cabinet on the 3rd February. They considered two papers by General Sir William Robertson,* one on the military situation in Mesopotamia and the other on the control of the operations there,† also the telegrams quoted above from General Duff.

In his review of the situation, Sir William Robertson's estimate of the strength of the Turkish forces was rather higher than that given by Sir Beauchamp Duff and he said that the Russian force in North-West Persia was believed to amount to 10,000 infantry, 9,000 cavalry and 30 guns.

After discussing the question of the relief of Kut, General Robertson came to the conclusion that while there were grounds for hoping that it might be effected before the garrison was

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* Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

† Both given in full in Appendix XVIII.

compelled by starvation to surrender, this was by no means certain and we should be prepared for either eventuality.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff then proceeded to discuss the alternatives open to us after the relief operations were over. The indications were that the Turks intended to make their main effort against Mesopotamia rather than against Egypt; and Sir William Robertson arrived generally at the same conclusion that the Commander-in-Chief in India had come to, namely, that it was important to hold Kut if it were possible to do so. He pointed out that this might prove to be greater economy of force than a withdrawal down the Tigris, which would entail risks of disturbance in Persia and Afghanistan. Moreover, if the Turks were to move their reserves towards Mesopotamia, it would lessen their power to attack Egypt and thus necessitate fewer British troops being retained in that country for its defence.

In conclusion, Sir William Robertson disagreed with Sir Beauchamp Duff in thinking the time opportune for an offensive towards Khaniqin by the Russians; and he considered the most valuable assistance the Russians could give us at the moment was to follow up their success in the neighbourhood of Erzerum.

The reasons why the War Office had not assumed control of the operations in Mesopotamia from their commencement have already been alluded to.* In his paper on the subject,† which the War Committee now considered, Sir William Robertson pointed out that in the past there had been advantages in the control by the Government of India of military operations where local knowledge was of paramount importance, where India herself had been able to meet the requirements of the situation, and where there had been no question of the employment of the resources of the Empire as a whole in the attainment of a common end. As this was no longer the case in Mesopotamia, the system of control had become cumbersome. General Robertson, therefore, proposed a new system, which would, in his opinion, enable the War Committee of the Cabinet to adjust more effectively the respective requirements of the campaign in Mesopotamia and of the campaigns in other theatres.

On the same day (3rd February) Mr. Chamberlain sent a private telegram to Lord Hardinge summarising this paper and gave the new system, as approved by the War Committee

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* See Volume I., Chapter IV.
† See Appendix XVIII.

subject to an expression of the Viceroy's views, in detail. Mr. Chamberlain personally welcomed the proposals as tending to more efficient co-operation and better support from England. Moreover, neither the Viceroy nor he could provide more troops; consequently for these he was as dependent on the War Office as he was for all military supplies. Responsibility and power were, therefore, divided; whereas under the new system they would be united in the Imperial General Staff under Cabinet control.

Lord Hardinge replied on the 10th February saying that he and Sir Beauchamp Duff whole-heartedly accepted the new arrangement; and the same day Sir Beauchamp Duff informed General Lake that the following procedure would be followed in future:—

(1) Instructions with regard to military operations in Mesopotamia and Persia would issue from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to the Commander-in-Chief in India, under the authority of the Secretary of State for War, in exactly the same manner as to the Commanders-in-Chief in other theatres. The decisions of the War Committee would of course form the basis of these instructions.

(2) India would remain the main base of the forces in Mesopotamia, which the Commander-in-Chief in India would continue to administer; the War Office supplying from other parts of the Empire such requirements as India could not meet, subject to the general policy at the time being decided upon by the War Committee.

(3) All reports of operations, returns, states, requests for additional units and recommendations as to higher appointments would be sent by the General Officer Commanding in Mesopotamia to the Commander-in-Chief in India and repeated to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

(4) Demands for drafts to maintain Indian units in Mesopotamia and for such war material as was being supplied by India would continue to be made to the Commander-in-Chief in India.

(5) The Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Commander-in-Chief in India would correspond direct, as required, in regard to the requirements of the force in Mesopotamia.

This assumption of control by the War Office forms a landmark in the history of the campaign in Mesopotamia. Greatly welcomed by Mr. Chamberlain, Lord Hardinge and all the military authorities, it was evident that, owing to the greater

interest taken in the operations by the War Office, this change in system would add greatly to the efficient conduct of the campaign.

At the beginning of 1916, the anxiety felt in India about the Afghan situation had its effect on the despatch of reinforcements to Mesopotamia. Writing to Mr. Chamberlain on the 14th January, Lord Hardinge said that members of the Turco-German Mission in Afghanistan were no longer under any restraint and were allowed to go about freely and talk to people in and about Kabul; and the stories spread of German plans in Egypt, Persia and Afghanistan and the preparation everywhere for a *Jahad* in the spring were causing some uneasiness in the North-West Frontier Province.* On the 1st February the Chief of the Imperial General Staff asked the Commander-in-Chief in India whether he could not expedite the despatch to Mesopotamia from India of the three reinforcing infantry brigades. In reply, on the 3rd, Sir Beauchamp Duff said that "with every desire to expedite the despatch of the three brigades, it would be imprudent in view of the present situation on the frontier to send more troops away from India until troops to replace them have actually arrived." Early in February, however, the Viceroy received a letter from the Amir, from which Lord Hardinge concluded that he meant to maintain neutrality if possible; and after some further correspondence it was arranged that four battalions should proceed from India before their reliefs arrived in that country.

On the 2nd February the Chief of the Imperial General Staff telegraphed to the Commander-in-Chief in India that the 13th Division was being prepared in Egypt for despatch to Mesopotamia if required†; and the next day Sir Beauchamp Duff was told that a mountain artillery brigade could also be sent from Egypt if required for Mesopotamia. On the 7th February, after hearing that General Lake could receive and maintain the 13th Division, whose despatch to Mesopotamia with the mountain artillery brigade General Duff considered necessary (and also hearing that General Townshend had supplies in Kut to last him till the 17th April) Sir William Robertson at once issued orders for them to move to Mesopotamia.‡

* The Afridis made no concealment of their intention to join in a *Jahad*, if it were proclaimed by the Amir of Afghanistan.

† It had to be reorganised and re-equipped after its withdrawal from Suvla.

‡ The 13th Division units arrived at Basra between 27th February and 12th March. The 7th Mountain Artillery Brigade (21st and 26th Indian Mountain Batteries) reached Basra 8th March.

In Persia, while the presence of Russian forces had exercised a steadying effect in the north and north-west, the end of 1915 saw German agents endeavouring to raise the tribes in the centre and south. German consuls or German agents with armed bands had visited the main centres, creating anti-British disturbances, plundering branches of the Imperial Bank of Persia, and assassinating prominent Persians of pro-British tendencies. In Shiraz the British Consul (Lieutenant-Colonel W. F. T. O'Connor) had been made prisoner, together with the whole British colony, and had been deported to Ahram, some miles from the coast. This critical situation was discussed fully with the Persian Government and it was arranged early in 1916 to send a British mission under Brigadier-General Sir Percy Sykes to maintain law and order in South Persia. Sir Percy Sykes was to raise a Persian force to replace the gendarmerie, who with their Swedish officers had by then practically all joined the Germans or had dispersed owing to lack of pay; and the Russians were to raise a similar force in the north.

On the Tigris the weather continued stormy with much rain from the 23rd to the end of January and there were no operations of importance. The Tigris rose to one of those high floods to which it is subject during the first five months of the year, inundating considerable areas of ground on the right bank. On the left bank, General Aylmer's infantry entrenched themselves strongly at distances varying from nine hundred to fifteen hundred yards from the hostile trenches; and a regular system of relief for trench duties was inaugurated. The force on the right bank also entrenched themselves, in a position to enfilade the Turkish works on the left bank. Reconnaissances of the country to northward, southward and westward were carried out, particular attention being paid to the possibility of finding a way through the marshes which covered the Turkish left flank.

From the 26th to the 28th January, General Townshend sent several telegrams referring to a Turkish division, estimated 6,000 strong, which had been seen from Kut moving from the Turkish camp at Shumran towards and across the Hai, over a bridge which could be seen under construction some five miles south of Kut. The first of these telegrams was in clear instead of in the usual cipher; the weather prevented any air reconnaissance on the 26th; and General Aylmer decided that day to ferry across the Tigris a great part of his force to meet what looked like a possible Turkish counter-offensive down the right bank. Cavalry and air reconnaissances, as

well as intelligence agents, from the 27th to the 30th, failed to discover the bridge over the Hai or the presence in its neighbourhood of any such large force as had been reported; and, in fact, the division never materialised. It has been suggested that it was a fallacy of vision due to mirage.* But until we get the Turkish account of these operations, we shall probably not know what foundation, if any, there was for the report. According to Goltz's staff officer, Kiesling, at this time the Turkish 35th and 52nd Divisions were in the Hanna defile, their 51st Division was on the left bank of the Tigris opposite Es Sinn, and the 45th Division was round Kut; while on the right bank at and in advance of Es Sinn were the Turkish cavalry brigade and the irregulars under Fazl Pasha. It seems possible that some of the leading units of the Turkish 2nd Division may have been about the Hai. The report had the result, however, of causing General Aylmer to move something over two brigades of infantry across the Tigris until he modified the order on the 28th, when he received the various reconnaissance and intelligence reports and also heard that bodies of Turkish troops were moving down the Tigris left bank towards their Hanna position. The incident raises the question, however, that if this report was due to mirage, there may have been similar fallacies of vision in other cases, notably when General Townshend had previously reported, to the great temporary bewilderment of General Aylmer, various large bodies of Turkish troops moving past Kut in both directions.

General Lake with a few of his staff, arrived at General Aylmer's headquarters on the 28th January and left again the next day for Basra, after a personal inspection and discussion with General Aylmer. From what General Lake had seen since his arrival in the country, he realised that the most pressing local needs were the proper organisation of General Aylmer's force and the provision of adequate arrangements and accommodation at Basra so that reinforcements might be pushed up the river as and when required. For this purpose his presence would be more useful for the time being at Basra than at the front. His views on the situation are evidenced by his telegram of the 28th to the Chief of the General Staff in India† :—

"... I had long discussion with Aylmer upon situation to-day. His difficulties have been enormous, due

* See article by Major-General W. D. Bird, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., in the Journal of the Royal United Service Institution for November 1922.

† This position was then held by Lieutenant-General Sir G. M. Kirkpatrick, the former Director of Military Operations.

to the atrocious weather and the pressure upon him to advance promptly without waiting to organise his force properly. The weather destroyed his bridges, flooded his camp and trenches and wore out his troops. The hurry of his advance was due to Townshend's appeals and neglect to state his true position regarding supplies.* The weather is somewhat better, though still threatening, and the river has fallen, but his men have suffered greatly and are not in condition for strenuous work. Nevertheless, matters are improving and he ought to be able to hold his present front until reinforcements now in Mesopotamia arrive.

"The date upon which he will again be able to contemplate advance to relief of Kut depends mainly on the arrival of a fresh bridging train, which is his greatest need. Boats and superstructure are on their way up river, but the local boats are proving quite unsuitable for the purpose and a largely increased number of pontoons is essential from India at the earliest possible date.†

"As regards supplies, we believe we can, largely in consequence of his heavy losses, keep him supplied until he is again made up to war establishment and the three new reinforcing brigades arrive.‡ By that time we hope that sufficient new river transport will have arrived from India and elsewhere to meet the increased demand . . . . As bearing upon the question of Aylmer's future advance, I trust the arrival of at least a portion of the three promised brigades can be expedited, otherwise I shall have no reserves in hand to support him in case of a reverse. Aylmer gives a somewhat unfavourable account of the *moral* of his Indian troops, but I am inclined to think this is largely due to the bad weather and that with finer and warmer weather their spirits will return, especially if their severe losses in officers who understand them can be made good."

This telegram was repeated to the India Office by India on he 1st February. The position was altogether difficult and

* It will be noticed that General Lake omits to mention the factor of the arrival of Turkish reinforcements, which was given as one of the contributory reasons for an early advance in Generals Nixon's and Aylmer's earlier appreciations.

† On the 31st January General Lake heard from India that a total of 104 pontoons had been and were being sent and that now a further 46 had been ordered and asking if these would suffice. In India itself orders were issued for the engineers to continue the manufacture of pontoons till further orders.

‡ i.e., 37th, 41st and 42nd Brigades from India, *see* page 284 *ante*.

was not pleasant to contemplate. On the 28th January, General Townshend reported the strength of the Kut garrison as 8,356 effective and 2,157 non-effective troops and 2,908 followers; and the Arab population numbered 6,300, making a total of 19,721 mouths to feed. He had roughly 600 rounds of rifle ammunition per man and a fair amount of gun ammunition which was being carefully husbanded. Taking into account this force and *assuming that the ranks of the units in General Aylmer's force were filled up promptly with drafts*, the available force at General Lake's disposal on the Tigris would not be much, if any, greater than the force which it was estimated that the Turks would shortly have at and below Baghdad. Quite irrespective of the difficulty of maintaining this force properly at the front owing to the shortage of river transport, there was little chance of General Aylmer having, as matters appeared to General Lake, anything like the numerical superiority usually supposed to be required for a successful offensive against an entrenched enemy.

After discussing the medical arrangements at the front with General Aylmer and going round the camp at Wadi, General Lake began to realise fully that they were still very unsatisfactory; and by that time they were much better than they had been during the recent fighting. On his return to Basra, General Lake sent for his senior medical officer, told him that medical arrangements up the river and especially at the front were by no means what they should be, and directed him to proceed upstream immediately and take steps to put matters right. General Lake would support him in anything he thought it necessary to do.

General Gorringe, who, on the 22nd, had been ordered to hand over to General Brooking the command of the troops on the Euphrates Line and proceed to Amara with his divisional staff to organise the forward despatch of reinforcements, was next day told to proceed to General Aylmer's headquarters, where he arrived on the 28th January and took over the appointment of Chief of the Staff of the Tigris Corps.* There was much reorganisation work to be done in General Aylmer's force. Units had been posted to formations as they arrived at the front in accordance with the exigencies of the moment and they had now to be sent to join their proper formations.

* This appointment, which was made as a temporary measure, at General Aylmer's special request, does not appear to have been notified to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff in London, who only became aware of it several months later.

The heavy losses had much disorganised most units* and steps to reorganise them and distribute among them drafts for units of the Kut garrison could, in the absence of a bridge, be only carried out gradually. At the beginning of February, General Aylmer had about 400 sabres, 4,000 rifles and 20 guns on the right bank of the Tigris, and about 900 sabres, 8,000 rifles and 26 guns on the left bank; while some 12,000 reinforcements were on their way up the Tigris to join him, of whom the greater portion were marching.

On the 4th February, the British intelligence staff estimated the Turkish numbers and dispositions as follows:—

(i) In the Hanna defile, 35th†, 51st and 52nd Divisions—approximately 12,000 rifles and over 26 guns.

(ii) In the Es Sinn position on the right bank, 1,500 to 2,000 regular cavalry and some two battalions of infantry, who were being reinforced by part of the recently arrived 2nd Division.

(iii) Round Kut, the 45th Division—4,000 to 5,000 rifles.

There were no indications that the Turks intended evacuation of the Hanna position.

According to the German writer, Kiesling, the Turks at the beginning of February had come to the conclusion that they had been wrong in thinking that General Aylmer would again make his main effort at Hanna. They foresaw that he would advance along the right bank, and to counter this move they began to ferry the 35th Division across the Tigris to the right bank Es Sinn position. The 52nd Division remained at Hanna, the 51st Division were posted as reserve on the left bank near Es Sinn and the 45th Division invested Kut. There is no mention of any of the 2nd Division units having then reached the front.

On the 4th February General Aylmer telegraphed to General Lake and obtained his approval that day to his plan for a renewed offensive, to be undertaken after reinforcements had reached him and his bridge over the Tigris had been completed. He would advance up the right bank of the Tigris with the largest force for which transport‡ was available, while leaving the lesser part of his force to hold the Turks on the left bank (or to follow them up if they retired). The

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* Effective strengths of cavalry, engineer and infantry units on 27th January 1916 are given in Appendix XIX.

† This division included the remnants of the former 38th Division.

‡ One thousand Indian Army Transport carts and between 2,000 and 3,000 pack mules.

right bank force would attack the Es Sinn or other positions, and if they obtained a decisive success, of which the chances appeared good, would move across the Hai, attack the enemy's bridge and ships at Shumran and cross to the left bank to deal with the Turkish forces there.

If General Aylmer did not gain sufficient success to allow of his crossing the Hai and seizing the enemy's camps, bridge and ships, it might be necessary to withdraw the garrison of Kut from the left bank, evacuating their wounded to General Aylmer's camp at Wadi, or even to withdraw the whole of the Kut garrison there. This was a possible though not a probable contingency, said General Aylmer, and he accordingly asked for full discretion in his operations after joining hands with General Townshend. In any case General Townshend should make preparations for constructing lines of entrenchments within his present area and other arrangements to facilitate his co-operation with General Aylmer on the right bank.

General Aylmer had for some days previously been in correspondence with General Townshend regarding the co-operation which might be expected from the Kut garrison. On the 29th January General Townshend had said that he saw no advantage in making an offensive effort unless it were carried out in combination with an advance by General Aylmer's force, owing to the danger that heavy losses to his attacking force might enable the Turks to follow them back into the Kut defences. When General Aylmer advanced, General Townshend could either attack the Turkish camp on the left bank above Kut, or the Turkish force on the left bank as it retired. The additional material which General Townshend would require to enable him to bridge the Tigris would, found General Aylmer, be more than he could carry with him by land up the right bank and consequently for co-operation on the right bank they would have to rely on ferrying men over from Kut. In this way it was considered that some 4,000 men could cross in one night.

On the 5th February, however, General Townshend reported that the Turks, having already hemmed him in by trenches to the northward of the peninsula, had now started to dig redoubts on the right bank of the river eastward of Kut, apparently to prevent his co-operating on the right bank with the relief force.

On the 6th General Aylmer telegraphed his plan fully to General Townshend. His land transport would only allow of his carrying one day's rations besides what was carried

on the soldier; and his advance would probably take place just after the middle of February, when his reinforcements had arrived. The probable strength of his force on the right bank would then be 12,000 rifles, with strong artillery and the cavalry brigade; and co-operation by the Kut garrison to the fullest extent possible was essential. The best way of ensuring this must depend on the developments during the next ten days and General Townshend was to consider most carefully the necessary arrangements. General Aylmer then entered into the different alternatives, which do not directly concern this narrative as the necessity for them did not arise; but they are given with General Townshend's reply in Appendix XX.*

A brief reference is now necessary to operations on the Euphrates, whence a detachment had been despatched, as described before, to demonstrate up the Hai. Just before handing over command to General Brooking, General Gorringe had reported that the tribes round Shatrat al Muntafik had expressed their determination to oppose a British advance up the Hai and he was consequently of opinion that a withdrawal from Butaniya, where the main detachment was encamped, might have a bad effect unless preceded by an advance. On the 28th January General Lake instructed General Brooking to withdraw the Butaniya detachment when weather and political conditions appeared favourable.

General Brooking finally decided that the withdrawal should take place on the 7th February. The detachment† at Butaniya was about 1,600 strong with 6 mountain guns under Brigadier-General E. C. Tidswell, commanding the 34th Brigade. No severe tribal pressure upon the withdrawal was anticipated; but for the sake of safety, General Brooking sent out from Nasiriya a detachment‡ of about 1,300 troops with 4 guns to a position half-way between Nasiriya and Butaniya to support the withdrawal.

As soon as General Tidswell started his retirement (about 8.30 a.m.), large numbers of Arabs began to harass the force and were joined gradually by contingents of Arabs from villages—supposed to be friendly—along the route. But they caused the British no undue losses until General Tidswell's detachment

* Further details concerning his plans for co-operation are given by General Townshend in the appendix of "My Campaign in Mesopotamia."

† One squadron, 12th Cavalry; half battalion, 2nd Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment; 1/5th Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey); 114th Mahrattas; 30th Mountain Battery.

‡ One squadron, 33rd Cavalry; 1/2nd Sussex Battery, R.F.A.; 44th Infantry; half 90th Punjabis.

had passed through the supporting force from Nasiriya. Then some of the Indian troops from Nasiriya were thrown into confusion by the determined attacks of the Arabs, whose numbers had reached about 5,000, and considerable casualties were incurred before the situation was restored. General Brooking in his report speaks highly of the gallantry at this stage of the 2nd Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment and the 30th Mountain Battery. In this action the British sustained 373 casualties. The Arabs, who are estimated to have had about 1,000 casualties, suffered further punishment on the 9th, when General Brooking surprised several of the so-called friendly villages and carried out punitive measures against them for their treachery.

On the 8th February, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff enquired from the Commander-in-Chief in India what orders had been given, in regard to his operations, to General Lake. Next day Sir Beauchamp Duff replied that before giving orders he had awaited a further appreciation from General Lake, which he had just received and which he repeated. In this, General Lake estimated that by the 15th February General Aylmer would have approximately 23,000 rifles, 1,300 sabres and 74 guns to oppose five Turkish divisions aggregating some 24,500 rifles, 1,500 sabres and possibly 78 guns; in addition, with General Townshend at Kut were 6,500 effective rifles, 200 sabres and 38 guns. Elsewhere in Mesopotamia there were: on the Euphrates, about 4,000 effectives with 14 guns; at Ahwaz, 600; and on the Tigris line of communication and at Basra (including reinforcing details not included in General Aylmer's total above), some 10,000 troops, as well as 450 rifles and 18 guns *en route* which could not reach General Aylmer till about the 25th February.

By the end of March, the two reinforcing divisions from Egypt and India would give General Lake an additional 18,000 rifles and at least 76 guns, while by the same date the Turks might be reinforced by four more divisions, or 30,000 rifles and 96 guns. Thus by that time the numbers on both sides might be approximately equal, though the British would have a superiority in guns. Shortage of river transport, however, made it impossible to foresee what force we could maintain beyond Amara at any given date, and shortage of land transport tied General Aylmer to operating close to the Tigris.

The main considerations were to relieve Kut and maintain our hold on Lower Mesopotamia; and in view of the uncertainty

regarding the dates of arrival of his reinforcements and of additional river craft, as well as the possibility of increases in Turkish strength, General Lake considered it undesirable to wait for additional troops before making another attempt to relieve Kut. General Aylmer's plan appeared to offer a fair prospect of success and General Lake had agreed that General Aylmer should advance when the bulk of the reinforcements now on their way up the Tigris reached him.

General Lake then went on to consider future possibilities and the alternatives open to him after the relief operations were over.

Sir Beauchamp Duff, in forwarding this appreciation, said that in view of the new arrangements for control of the operations he would await a communication from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff before sending any orders to General Lake, on whose appreciation he offered the following criticisms. Deducting the Turkish force required to contain Kut, he estimated that General Aylmer would have to drive some 16,500 Turkish troops with possibly 58 guns out of fortified positions; and, remembering that General Aylmer was deficient in high-explosive shell, General Duff did not consider the British superiority in guns would be sufficient. He, therefore, thought it would be better for General Aylmer to await the eighteen guns then *en route* and due to reach him on the 25th February.

Further, General Lake, when he wrote his appreciation, was probably unaware that the whole of the 13th Division should reach Basra early in March, or that the leading units of the three brigades from India would get there during February, although the whole could not reach Basra before the 15th March. General Duff continued: "My conclusion is, then, that a premature advance should not be attempted by Aylmer, and that, subject to the condition that his advance should not be delayed beyond March 15th unless the situation of Townshend becomes so critical as to require an earlier attempt, he should await all the reinforcements that he can get. If I were in his place I should personally elect to make my main effort on the right bank, but the man on the spot must be left to decide this tactical point. The danger is of course that the Turks, if we delay, may obtain reinforcements more quickly than we do. This danger I should chance."

General Duff did not consider that General Townshend would be able to do much in the way of co-operating with General Aylmer.

Sir William Robertson replied on the 10th February. He was in general accord with Sir Beauchamp Duff's remarks on General Lake's appreciation. The General Staff at the War Office estimated that although the Turks might bring larger numbers to Baghdad they could not maintain more than 50,000 below that locality. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff then, referring to a telegram sent by General Lake on the 9th asking that the Russian Kermanshah column should be asked to co-operate when General Aylmer advanced and pointing out how evenly balanced the latter's chances of success were, asked General Duff to issue orders for General Lake's guidance as to the date for renewing operations. Until this was decided and known, there could be no question of approaching the Russians.

General Robertson concluded by saying that the question of river transport appeared to be the most important matter and he asked for details of the craft available and under supply, also whether these would suffice for the requirements of the force and in what way he could be of assistance.

Accordingly, the Commander-in-Chief in India telegraphed to General Lake on the 11th and, after summarising the views given above, General Duff said that both the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and he felt that the advance should not take place before the 15th March, though the final decision must rest with General Lake.

Considerable correspondence then ensued as to the date on which the offensive was to commence, and certain factors were brought forward which had not been realised or taken into account by the Commander-in-Chief in India or the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. The most important was the fact that it was not safe to reckon on the country being free from floods after the 15th March. Consequently, to escape possibly disastrous results, General Aylmer should, if possible, have concluded his operations by then. The available river craft were barely sufficient to keep General Aylmer supplied, few additional river steamers seemed likely to arrive in the next few weeks and it was doubtful if the land route from Qurna to Amara could be used after the floods started. For these reasons General Lake saw little chance of being able to send the two reinforcing divisions up the river or to supply them above Amara for several weeks.

The question thus turned, said General Aylmer on the 17th February, on the maximum number of troops which could arrive before the floods and which could also be supplied.

He was still of opinion that an offensive along the right bank offered the best chances of success, but the strength of the force he could use there was strictly limited by the amount of land transport at his disposal.* In consequence, all the additional force that he could utilise efficiently for holding operations against the Turks were two more infantry brigades, so that there was little advantage in awaiting further large reinforcements as this would also give time to the Turks to strengthen their defence. He asked for another artillery brigade to be sent to him as early as possible as well as the two infantry brigades; and he said that he proposed to start his right bank offensive at the most opportune moment.†

In the meantime, on the 13th February, General Townshend, expressing anxiety on account of the reports of the imminent arrival of two fresh Turkish divisions, urged that General Aylmer should advance as soon as possible.

Turning now to the enemy view of the situation at this period, Oberstleutnant von Kiesling gives in his book the text of a memorandum on the situation written on the 16th February by Field-Marshal von der Goltz. The situation had, he said, changed little since the failure of the British to take Baghdad in November 1915. The attempts of the British 3rd and 7th Divisions to relieve Kut had failed and they remained in entrenched positions at Wadi and Shaikh Saad. Between them and Kut, to oppose their advance, were the Turkish 52nd Division on the left bank at Hanna and the 35th Division on the right bank at Es Sinn, while the 45th and 51st Divisions contained Kut.‡ The lack of artillery, ammunition and modern means of attack precluded an assault on Kut.

The four Turkish divisions, each about 4,000 or 5,000 strong, were in all weaker than Generals Aylmer's and Townshend's forces combined, but the complete arrival of the Turkish 2nd Division would alter the position. Unfortunately, however, part of this division would probably have to be sent to Persia.

A small mixed detachment was being sent to Hilla on the Euphrates to re-establish Turkish authority, and lower down that river the loyal Muntafik Arabs under Ajaimi were in touch with the British at Nasiriya.

* On the 4th February, General Lake offered to send up some motor lorries, of which he had 100 at Basra, but pointed out that they would have to be sent up by river. General Aylmer, however, refused them as the ground was, and would be for some time, quite unsuitable for them.

† For the full text of General Aylmer's telegram, *see* Appendix XXI.

‡ According to Kiesling, the 51st Division was more of a central reserve.

Owing to the lack of troops near Baghdad and between there and Mosul, the situation might become serious if the Russians in Armenia, who had entered Erzerum the previous day, pressed further forward; on the borders of Azerbaijan they had only weak detachments.

The Arabs, said Goltz, were waiting to see who would lose the struggle in order to strike on the side of the victor. They were inclined, however, to be pro-British rather than pro-Turk.

Mesopotamia itself had provided no war material, for they had only been able recently to produce a certain amount of munitions in Baghdad. Everything had to come along the inefficient 1,250-mile line of communication from Constantinople; and instead of getting 10,000 men in drafts as promised, only 4,500 had arrived.

Nothing more could be done on the Tigris line until the situation of the Third Turkish Army* became more favourable and more transport was sent to the Sixth Army. If Kut surrendered, one of the weaker divisions could be sent to Persia, but it would only suffice to make the present Turkish position there secure.

Goltz concluded by saying that the Turks in Mesopotamia were not favourably disposed towards the Germans, whom they looked on as irksome intruders rather than helpful friends, and he complained of obstruction by the Turks.

Having obtained General Lake's consent to act when he thought best, General Aylmer, on the 26th February, communicated to General Headquarters and to General Townshend his intention of advancing in eight or nine days' time. General Lake informed the Commander-in-Chief in India and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff that he had authorised General Aylmer to deliver his blow whenever the time seemed ripe for the purpose. After showing how the approaching incidence of the floods necessitated an early advance, General Lake went on to say that when the 37th Infantry Brigade (from India) and the leading brigade of the 13th Division, then being sent up, had reached General Aylmer, he would have at the front about the maximum force that could be maintained and supplied there. Additional river steamers then on their way to Basra from Bombay might allow of further reinforcements being pushed up, but they could hardly be in time for the advance.

On the whole, throughout February, the weather proved to be good, although there were occasional heavy rainstorms,

* Opposing the Russians in the north.

which rendered the ground for a day or two unfit for movement; but by the end of the month floods had rendered the road from Basra to Qurna impassable, though the portion above Qurna could still be used between floods and after repairs.

Preparations for renewing the offensive, reorganisation* and training of General Aylmer's force continued. On the left bank the British trenches were improved and pushed forward to within six or seven hundred yards of the Turkish lines at Hanna; and a bridge across the Tigris, about half a mile upstream of the Wadi junction, was completed on the 11th February. But General Aylmer had still no means of transporting his bridging boats by land.

Frequent reconnaissances were made by land and air on both banks of the Tigris.† The Suwaikiya marsh was reconnoitred in vain with the object of discovering a way across it; and on the right bank it was found that the mile-wide belt of mud round the Umm al Baram, and the tendency of the wind as it changed to shift its water for quite long distances, rendered any reliance on it for drinking water practically impossible.

For the greater part of February General Aylmer had only one serviceable aeroplane at his disposal and, although by the end of the month three machines of the Royal Naval Air Service had joined him, he had no longer superiority in the air. The Turkish aeroplanes were increasing in number and efficiency and were generally faster and better fighting machines than those of the British. In addition to bombing Kut periodically, three of them bombed General Aylmer's camp on the 22nd February.

On the 17th February General Lake learnt of the great Russian victory over the Turks at Erzerum and on the 25th he heard from the Russian General, Baratoff, that he was advancing on Kermanshah, which in fact he captured that day.

At the beginning of February trouble appeared to be imminent at Bushire owing to a hostile concentration in its vicinity, which under the influence of Wassmuss and other anti-British agents appeared so threatening that arrangements were made to send a battalion to Bushire from Mesopotamia in case of necessity.

* There was trouble among some of the Indian Mahomedan troops, owing to religious scruples against fighting on the holy soil of Mesopotamia against their co-religionists; but it proved to be confined to one or two units, which were sent out of the country.

† Edmund Candler in Chapter XI of "The Long Road to Baghdad" gives a graphic and interesting account of the cavalry reconnaissance work during this period.

In the middle of February General Aylmer decided to make a surprise demonstration against the rear of the Turkish position at Hanna. His object* was to inflict as much damage as possible on the enemy in their main camp behind Hanna and force them to disclose their dispositions. General Aylmer informed General Townshend of his intention, saying that it was even possible that the enemy might be induced to vacate his position, in which case General Aylmer would follow him up. General Townshend might thus get a favourable opportunity for offensive measures for which he was to be prepared. Originally planned for the night of the 20th/21st, rain caused the project to be postponed for twenty-four hours.

During the following night and on the 22nd, on the left bank General Norie's brigade, from a point three miles north of our right flank, made a feint at crossing the Suwaikiya marsh to the Turks' left rear; the 7th Division by a demonstration drew a heavy fire from the Hanna trenches; and a column† under General Gorringe moved up the right bank of the Tigris. At daybreak on the 22nd, while General Gorringe's guns bombarded the enemy camps north of the Fallahiya bend, causing considerable confusion, part of his column pushed upstream as far as Sannaiyat. Here the right bank of the river commanded the left bank; the river was low and the current slack; and General Gorringe in his report says that if he had been in possession of a pontoon train, he could—by taking advantage of the surprise he had effected—have crossed the river and shut the Turks into their Hanna position.‡ As it was, he kept up a fire on the enemy parties who attempted to return to their camp areas or to reinforce their Hanna trenches.

With regard to the possibility and advisability of attempting to move a force across the Tigris so as to shut the Turks into the defile about Hanna, General Aylmer had already given the question full consideration and had discarded the idea as too risky and precarious. His reasons were, briefly, as follows. From several positions between Hanna and Kut the Turks could bring an effective artillery cross fire to bear on almost any crossing place; the river was some three hundred yards wide with at times a strong current; and any British force

* As announced to his troops. For his further object, see subsequent narrative.

† Cavalry Brigade (less two squadrons), 3rd Division, 36th Infantry Brigade, 28th Battery, R.F.A., 23rd Mountain Battery.

‡ The force carried with it a considerable number of sham pontoons in carts to give the impression that a crossing would be attempted.

sent across would have to be strong enough to withstand attack from both directions. Troops could cross by a boat bridge, by flying bridge, by boat ferry or by a combination of these. Of these methods of crossing the boat bridge was, in General Aylmer's opinion, the only one which would ensure a sufficiently large force getting across in time. But he had not sufficient boats or pontoons for another bridge, i.e., besides the one over the Tigris by his camp, and he had no means of transporting the boats by land if he had them. It is true that means of transport might have been improvised, but intelligence of his preparations in such a direction could hardly fail to reach the Turks; and this would still further lessen the chances of a surprise which would be so necessary for success. It might be feasible to construct a flying bridge, but all calculations showed that to get a sufficiently large force across by this means, even in combination with boat ferries, would take much longer than the Turks would require to organise an effective opposition to the crossing. Consequently the risks of disaster owing to probable losses among the boats and men seemed so great as to render the project impracticable. Moreover, sudden rain and a rise in the river might at any time cut off the force on the further bank from all support.

The Turks appeared to have been thoroughly alarmed by these operations and their dispositions for meeting an attack became apparent. Air reconnaissance on the morning of the 22nd reported the Hanna and Es Sinn positions to be held in strength, as well as the despatch of reinforcements from Shumran to the Maqasis ferry.

On the 23rd February General Gorringe was wounded while carrying out a personal reconnaissance and General Keary took over the command of the advanced right bank force. The Turks were now busily engaged in strengthening their defences at Sannaiyat, in making covered communication from there to Hanna and in digging trenches along the Fallahiya bend to oppose a crossing. General Aylmer's reports of the 22nd and 23rd show that he considered the results to have been very successful. General Keary's guns at the northern end of the Fallahiya bend would be able, he considered, to search the interior of the Hanna position and General Aylmer still had hopes that he might be able to push troops through the marsh on the Turkish left so as to intercept their retreat. General Aylmer, as a matter of fact, received the impression that the Turks intended to evacuate their Hanna position as soon as they could get their guns out.

On the 24th General Keary pushed an infantry brigade and a battery farther up the right bank in order to enfilade the rear of the Sannaiyat position; and some enemy cavalry were driven out of Bait Isa by shell fire. But the enemy, far from showing signs of evacuating the Hanna position, was busy entrenching against a possible attack against his left and left rear through the marsh.

General Aylmer's real motive for this movement along the right bank was to reduce the distance his force would have to march to the attack of the Es Sinn position, which he proposed to outflank by a night march followed by an attack at dawn. To conceal this object he did everything possible to induce the Turks to believe that his main effort was directed at ejecting them from their left bank Hanna position. Until the Turkish account of the operations is published we shall probably not know how far he was successful; for though their efforts to strengthen their positions on the left bank seem to show that he was, the Turks started at this time, evidently as a counter move, to construct a line of entrenchments running south-west from Bait Isa towards the Sinn Banks. In any case, however, General Keary's forward position gave General Aylmer the nearer starting point which he required for his coming attack.

The order of battle and the distribution of the British forces in Mesopotamia on the 27th February is given in Appendix XXII. It will be noticed in this how their heavy losses had necessitated the amalgamation of some battalions into composite units and how others had to be formed or strengthened by drafts for the Kut garrison.

Regarding the operations at Kut itself during January and February there is little to relate. Early in January it appeared that the Turks were largely reducing their investing force in order to oppose General Aylmer's advance; and as the days passed it became increasingly evident that the Turks had little intention of attempting another assault. They continued, however, to improve the old, and construct new, trenches so as to hem the garrison in more completely and prevent co-operation with the relieving force. The Turkish guns continued their periodical bombardments, directed for the most part against the fort and town; and their rifle fire never ceased, day or night. Carried out both by snipers at close range and by random long range fire, no part of the area was ever safe from bullets.

Practically the only exceptions to these blockade tactics were two attacks on Woolpress Village on the night of the

19th/20th January and on the 22nd February; but only on the former of these occasions was an attempt made to assault and this was easily driven back.

Heavy rain on the 7th and 8th January, on the 16th and 17th and again from the 20th to the 24th added much to the difficulties and discomfort of the garrison. From the first the low-lying area in the peninsula suffered much from inundation and all the trenches were more or less flooded. The Tigris rose steadily during this period and on the 21st January, breaking through many of the protective dams, completely flooded the western portion of the northern line of defence, forcing the British to evacuate these trenches under the close range fire of the Turks. This caused many British casualties, but they soon were able to retaliate when the floods forced the Turks also to evacuate their front line trenches.*

As a result, the British front line thenceforward ran from the Fort to near Redoubt B and then back via Middle Line to the river bank north of the palm groves†; and the Turkish front line was moved back to a distance varying from 1,200 to 1,500 yards from this British line, except northeast of the Fort, where their advanced posts were still maintained about 450 yards off. The British reconnoitring patrols were thus able to move out some distance from their line and to fill in some of the Turkish trenches, of which, in places, they found over twenty rows, all very deep and well connected by communicating trenches.

This Turkish withdrawal gave the garrison some relief and proved to be the end of active siege warfare; for, though the area dried up during February, the Turks did not again advance their lines. On the other hand, at the beginning of February, they started to entrench on the right bank of the river, eastward of Kut, thus further restricting the ability of the garrison to co-operate with General Aylmer.

When the rain ceased, the weather remained very cold, eleven degrees of frost being registered on two occasions. By the middle of February, the floods had quite subsided, the Tigris had become low again and it began to get quite warm; and then the pest of flies began.

The first Turkish aeroplane over Kut was seen on the 1st January and for the next six weeks their aeroplanes confined

* All through January, the garrison, assisted by large gangs of Arabs, had to work hard at protective works on most nights to prevent the flooding of the whole area and of the town.

† See Map 11.

To face page 306.

Camp at Wadi: February 1916. Showing level of river above camp.

themselves to observation work. On the 13th February the garrison experienced their first bombardment from the air; and although, by placing machine guns on the roofs of houses and by improvising an anti-aircraft gun from one of the 13-pounders left behind by "S" Battery, R.H.A., they forced the hostile aeroplane to keep at higher altitudes, they suffered from further periodical bombardments, which at times did considerable damage.

Up to the 21st January, the full scale of rations (with the exception of potatoes and vegetables, which were not available) was issued to the garrison. On that date, as already related, General Townshend decided not only to put his men on half rations, but also to search for and requisition all kinds of foodstuffs in the town. As a result, he obtained some 927 tons barley, 100 tons of wheat, 19½ tons of *ghi*,* besides small quantities of dates and other diet accessories.†

Soon after this, horse flesh was issued as part of the regular ration, but most of the Indian troops, owing to deep-rooted caste or religious prejudices, refused to touch it; and although messages were later on sent to them by their religious leaders in India authorising its consumption, many of them still persisted in their refusal.

The British bread ration was maintained at the reduced scale of three-quarters of a pound throughout February, though its quality deteriorated. The scale of accessories, i.e., bacon, cheese, jam, butter, etc., had to be much reduced and sugar ran out altogether by the end of January, though a small issue of dates and tea was maintained till the beginning of March.

For Indians, a scale of 1½ pounds of *atta* was maintained till the 24th February, when it was replaced by 4 ounces of *atta* and 10 ounces of barley meal; 2 ounces of *goor*‡ was issued daily until the beginning of March, when it came to an end, and *ghi*, on a gradually reducing scale, lasted till the middle of March.

Fuel wood was always a difficulty and doors and windows of the houses had to be utilised for the purpose. Fortunately, a stock of crude oil was found in the town and after the 5th February this was used for cooking.

The general health of the troops had improved since their arrival at Kut and remained good up to the middle of January,

* Clarified butter.

† A large proportion of the grain now taken over was the property of Lynch Brothers.

‡ Unrefined sugar.

when it began to decline somewhat, and was fair up to the end of February.* A few cases of scurvy appeared in the middle of January among the Indians and the incidence gradually rose, the number of cases being 140 in the middle of February with an accession of about five fresh cases daily. This was due to improper and insufficient food, especially to the absence of fresh vegetables and fresh meat.

The supply of drugs and dressings was fortunately sufficient, but there were not enough medical comforts, and after the 21st January the strict economy that had to be maintained prevented their issue to a good many of the sick and wounded who would normally have got them.

The casualties of the siege up to the 29th February totalled 2,927, i.e., killed or died of wounds 846, wounded 1,608, missing or deserted 30, and died of disease 443†.

In January and February, General Townshend issued various communiqués to his troops giving information of General Aylmer's operations and the expectations regarding relief. Owing to the risk of assisting the enemy, it is always difficult to judge how much information it is advisable to publish to troops, especially in a case like this, when the Turks were in constant communication with the Arabs in the town. General Townshend, however, decided to run the risk, both to keep up the spirits of his men and to prevent the dissemination of groundless rumours or incorrect information; and it is impossible, at any rate until the Turkish account of their operations is published, to say whether by his action he did any great harm. It would appear from Kiesling's account that the Turks did not get possession of these communiqués till after the fall of Kut.

Much has been said in the last few chapters of the difficulties with which the British forces had been confronted owing to transport shortage and inadequate bridging equipment. It must be conceded, however, that our opponents were no better off, for they had no river transport and very few boats or pontoons below Kut. The evidence of prisoners tends to show that the Turkish soldier was frequently short of food, clothing and other necessaries, and German accounts say that

* The most prevalent diseases were gastro-enteritis, diarrhoea and malaria among British troops, and dysentery and pneumonia among the Indian troops. In January and early February frost-bite and trench rheumatism were also common.

† The incidence of these casualties among the different ranks was British officers 58, Indian officers 34, British other ranks 489, Indian other ranks 1,946, followers 400.

the Turkish force in Mesopotamia sustained many losses at this time from spotted fever, and received insufficient reinforcements. Generally, therefore, although we do not yet know how great the Turkish difficulties were, it is clear that at this period their men displayed fine qualities of courageous determination under conditions of considerable hardship.

At the end of February the whole situation in the East was reviewed by the War Committee of the Cabinet. The evacuation of Gallipoli had produced less effect in the Mahomedan world than had been anticipated, but hostile propaganda among their peoples was growing and it seemed possible that unrest might spread from Persia through Afghanistan into India. The seventeen British divisions in Egypt and Mesopotamia, engaged in watching and fighting the Turks, secured our positions in those areas, with the exception of Kut; and the recent success of the 150,000 Russians in the Caucasus had diverted there some of the Turkish reinforcements meant for Mesopotamia. The Russian force in Northern Persia had brought about an improvement of the situation there; and it was hoped that the mission under Sir Percy Sykes would bring about a similar improvement in Southern and Central Persia, where an active policy was to be pursued under his auspices; and arrangements were made to reinforce him with a small force of Indian artillery and infantry, while the Indian Government were to undertake operations in East Persia.

The situation in Afghanistan and on the North-West Frontier of India was uncertain and preparations for a *Jahad* in the spring were reported. The German mission at Kabul were said to have no hope of getting the Amir of Afghanistan to side with them, and were said to be meditating a *coup d'etat* to effect their purpose. Plans drawn up by the General Staff in India to meet such an eventuality, which would probably mean an Afghan invasion carried out in combination with a more or less general rising along the North-West Frontier, showed that the forces in India would be insufficient. The British Government, therefore, agreed that a reserve of two divisions in Egypt should be designated to reinforce India in such a contingency.

For the moment, however, Kut was the danger spot; for its surrender might afford the agitators the opportunity they desired.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SECOND ATTEMPT TO RELIEVE KUT: THE ATTACK ON THE DUJAILA REDOUBT.

(MAP 17.)

BY the beginning of March 1916 it had become evident to the British that the Turkish force on the Tigris had not been reinforced to the extent that had been anticipated; and this apparent change in plan was attributed to the recent Russian victory at Erzerum. It was estimated that a Turkish cavalry brigade and five infantry divisions (2nd, 35th, 45th, 51st and 52nd), with possibly in addition a few battalions of the 41st Division, were opposing Generals Aylmer and Townshend with an effective strength of some 1,500 sabres, 25,000 rifles and 80 guns. The 45th and part of the 2nd Divisions (7,500 rifles and 21 guns) were thought to be investing Kut and in general reserve at Shumran; the 51st and 52nd Divisions (8,000 rifles and 24 guns) had been located on the left bank of the Tigris in the Hanna trenches and positions in rear; the Cavalry Brigade, 35th Division, part of the 2nd Division and possibly some battalions of the 41st Division (1,500 sabres, 8,500 rifles and 32 guns) were believed to be holding the Es Sinn position on the right bank of the Tigris, a portion of them being in the advanced trenches about Bait Isa with others near Maqasis; and a detachment (1,000 rifles) was reported near the bridge recently completed over the Hai, just east of Besouia.

From information subsequently obtained from Turkish sources and from the German accounts of Gleich and Kiesling * it appears that only seven battalions of the 2nd Division were on the Tigris front, that no portion of the 41st or any other fresh division was there, and that the actual strength of the force in rifles was some 4,000 less than the British estimate. Until the Turkish account of these operations is published, however, estimates of their effective strength must be accepted with caution.

The enemy entrenchments on the left bank of the Tigris had been much improved and strengthened. The Hanna line was held strongly and was connected with the positions at Fallahiya, Sannaiyat and Nukhailat by trenches which, while affording a covered communication between these positions, gave protection against enfilade fire from the opposite bank

* "Vom Balkan nach Baghdad," by Major-General von Gleich. "Mit Feldmarschall von der Goltz Pascha in Mesopotamien und Persien," by Oberstleutnant H. von Kiesling.

of the river and provided means to oppose any British attempts at crossing upstream of Hanna. In regard to any such attempt it is noteworthy that from Sannaiyat to Nukhailat the right bank of the Tigris slightly commanded the left, whilst generally elsewhere in this area the reverse was the case. Moreover, for the reasons already given in the previous chapter, General Aylmer still considered such a crossing to be impracticable.

On the right bank, the Turkish main line of entrenchments ran southward from the Tigris past the Sinn Banks to groups of mounds some twenty feet high, crowned by the Sinn Abtar and Dujaila redoubts. Till the beginning of March the Dujaila redoubt formed the right of this position, but the Turks then began the construction of a series of short trenches, dug at 500-yard intervals, on a line running south-west from the vicinity of the Dujaila redoubt towards the Hai.* There were advanced positions at Bait Isa and opposite Nukhailat, a trench about three and a half miles due east of the Dujaila redoubt, and a bridgehead, recently commenced, to protect the Hai crossing.

The country on the right bank was the usual Mesopotamian plain interspersed with small sandhills, banks, mounds and dry water-channels, the remains of ancient irrigation systems. Much of the area was liable to inundation from the Tigris, and it seemed probable that, as soon as the floods began, the Turks would utilise the advantage of their upstream positions to strengthen their defences by flooding large areas. The sandhills and mounds were so indistinguishable from the surrounding landscape that not only were they of no use for purposes of direction, but in the general haze and mirage they actually added to the difficulties of locating hostile entrenchments. The general situation of the Turkish main position, however, was well indicated by the outstanding Sinn Banks, the Sinn Abtar and Dujaila redoubts, and the shrine of Imam al Mansur.

A distinct feature in the area was the Dujaila depression,† which, starting from the Tigris in a south-westerly direction, followed a winding course till it disappeared in the desert south of the Umm al Baram. According to local tradition,

* The experience of our troops in the attack, and subsequent information, showed that the Turks had concealed many of their trenches so well with brushwood, etc., that they were not observed by our aeroplanes nor shown by the photos which the British air force in Mesopotamia were then beginning to take.

† It was not, however, much of a landmark, as it was usually not visible till closely approached.

this depression is a former bed of the Tigris, but in 1916 it varied in width from one to two hundred yards, and while in some places its bed was so shallow as to be hardly distinguishable at all, in others it was some fifteen feet deep. Like most other waterways in the country, its banks were generally higher than the surrounding plain and its bed was frequently covered with low prickly shrub.

By the end of February General Aylmer's infantry on the left bank of the Tigris had pushed forward their trenches to within three hundred yards of the hostile position at Hanna ;* and the force on the right bank under General Keary held a position just eastward of Sannaiyat. Some time before this, Generals Lake and Aylmer, after full discussion, had come to the conclusion that an attack against the Turkish right at Dujaila offered the best prospects of success ; but they considered it essential to carry out this attack before the spring floods began, before the Turks received further reinforcement or constructed a bridge at Maqasis † and before they could further strengthen their defences. By the 5th March, when 1,400 rifles of the recently arrived 37th Brigade were due to reach the front, the strength of General Aylmer's Corps would amount to about 1,400 sabres, 24,000 rifles and 92 guns ; and this would enable him to use some seven infantry brigades and 68 guns ‡ against the Es Sinn right bank position, whose Turkish garrison was thought to be at the most 10,000 or 11,000 rifles. Moreover, it was hoped that in this attack General Townshend would be able to co-operate with a force from Kut. It was considered, therefore, that any delay after the 6th March, the date at first fixed for the attack, was most undesirable except in the case of bad weather, which did in fact cause two postponements of twenty-four hours each ; and General Aylmer was authorised to act at once when the right moment arrived without waiting for General Lake's arrival or further instructions.§

For some days at the end of February General Aylmer had been taking steps to conceal his real intention from the enemy.

* General Aylmer purposely limited their advance to this distance so as to render a counter-attack from Hanna by the Turks more difficult, i.e., during the attack of his own main force against Es Sinn on the right bank.

† By this time the Turks had at least 14 large boats or rafts besides several small boats at Maqasis, and there were constant reports of the arrival there of other bridging material.

‡ See Appendix XXIII.

§ General Lake still considered that the serious difficulties involved in the reorganisation of the base and of the line of communication up the Tigris rendered his constant presence at Basra imperative.

This was all the more necessary as, owing to the unavoidably large number of local Arab boatmen employed by the British and to some desertions among Indian Mahomedan personnel, the Turks could generally obtain early intelligence of British movements and announcements. General Aylmer's efforts to mislead the enemy consisted mainly of constant artillery bombardments of the Hanna position, accompanied by increased infantry activity in his front line trenches on the left bank and by movements which appeared to threaten encirclement at Hanna. Although these activities were somewhat interrupted at the beginning of March by adverse weather conditions, General Aylmer issued orders on the 3rd for an operation "to effect a crossing over the Tigris on the night of the 5th/6th March with a view to capturing the Hanna position" *; and at the same time he had approaches for a bridge, upstream of Hanna, prepared somewhat ostentatiously. This order and action were intended to mislead the enemy; and this was well understood by the senior officers of General Aylmer's force. His real orders for the attack on Dujaila had already been prepared by General Gorringe, who, though still rather incapacitated by his wound and unable to ride, was continuing his functions as Chief of Staff.

Between the 26th February and the 5th March Generals Aylmer and Townshend exchanged several telegrams in regard to the assistance which the garrison of Kut could give in the coming attack on Dujaila. General Townshend said that he could not safely begin preparations to cross the river until General Aylmer's force had actually started its attack; and even then it would take three to five hours before he could expect to get up two flying bridges by which he could send across some 150 men an hour. By weakening his northern front he would be able to concentrate two infantry brigades which he would hold ready to cross the river to General Aylmer's assistance unless, as seemed probable to General Townshend, the Turks were to attack this northern front in force, when he would have to reinforce it. In addition, he would concentrate twenty-one of his guns to fire southward of Kut, but he was doubtful if their shells could reach the Turkish crossing over the Hai, which General Aylmer had suggested as a possible objective.†

* It is to be noted that when this order was issued it was still General Aylmer's intention to carry out his right bank attack on the 6th.

† General Townshend found subsequently that his 5-inch guns could shell both this Hai crossing and the Maqasis ferry, but that without aeroplane observation their fire was not effective.

On the 5th March, six squadrons of Turkish cavalry—apparently carrying out a reconnaissance—moved by the south of the Umm al Baram round the left of General Keary's force; but they withdrew at once on the British cavalry brigade advancing against them. On the same day one of the few British aeroplanes was shot down by Turkish machine gun fire and fell behind the enemy lines at Es Sinn, its pilot and observer both being killed.

On the 6th General Aylmer issued his operation order for the attack on the Es Sinn position, giving as his intention "to turn the right flank of the Es Sinn position by seizing the Dujaila redoubt and following this up by capturing the whole position."*

General Younghusband with a weak cavalry regiment, eight infantry battalions, one pioneer battalion, two sapper companies and twenty-four guns—and assisted by the naval gunboats—was to contain the enemy in his left bank Hanna position, guard the British camp and Tigris bridge, and be prepared to follow up the Turks if they retired.† In separate special instructions he was told that, if the Turks moved the whole of their force from the left bank of the Tigris to the right, he might have to send part of his own force to the right bank; and he was informed that in view of a possible, though not probable, gas attack, gas helmets were being issued for his men.

The striking force on the right bank consisted of four cavalry regiments, twenty-eight infantry battalions, three sapper companies and sixty-eight guns; and the greater part of it was to concentrate for the night march at a rendezvous near the Pools of Siloam at 8.30 p.m. on the 7th March.‡ Those

* For order, see Appendix XXIV.

† Composition of General Younghusband's force was :—
16th Cavalry (1¾ squadrons), 19th Infantry Brigade (less 92nd Punjabis), 21st Infantry Brigade, 36th Sikhs (arrived from Basra 8 p.m., 7th March), 107th Pioneers, 3rd and 13th Companies, Sappers and Miners, 1/1st and 1/3rd Sussex Field Batteries (8 guns), 44th Field Battery (6 guns), and 72nd, 77th and one section 104th Heavy, Batteries (10 guns).

‡ Composition of the force on the right bank :—
Cavalry Brigade ("S" Battery, R.H.A., 14th Hussars, 4th and 33rd Cavalry, 7th Lancers).
3rd Division (one troop, 16th Cavalry, 7th, 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades, 20th and 21st Companies, Sappers and Miners, 4th Brigade, R.F.A., 60th Howitzer Battery).
28th, 35th, 36th and 37th Infantry Brigades (37th consisted of 1/4th Somerset Light Infantry, 1/2nd Gurkhas, 92nd Punjabis, 34th Pioneers).
9th and 13th Brigades, R.F.A. (less 44th Battery).
61st Howitzer Battery.
23rd Mountain Battery (less one section).
12th Company, Sappers and Miners (less one section).

units of the force not already on the right bank were to move into the 3rd Division area after dark on the 6th and 7th ; and the concentration at the rendezvous was to be screened by the 35th Brigade group (a section of field guns, a squadron of cavalry and the 35th Brigade) under General Rice, which after dark on the 7th was to take up a line running south from the Tigris to about two miles west of the Pools of Siloam.

At the rendezvous the force was to form up in three groups. The first and leading group, under the command of General Kemball, was composed of two columns : Column A, consisting of the 36th Infantry Brigade, half 34th Pioneers, 8th Battery, R.F.A., a section 12th Sapper Company, with four canvas boats, and a field ambulance, under the command of General Christian ; and Column B, comprising the 9th and 28th Infantry Brigades, 9th Brigade, R.F.A., a section 61st Howitzer Battery, 12th Sapper Company (less two sections) and three and a half field ambulances, under General Kemball's own command.

The second group consisted of the Cavalry Brigade and a field ambulance under command of General Stephen.

The third group, termed Column C, was under General Keary, the commander of the 3rd Division. It comprised the 7th and 8th Infantry Brigades, 37th Infantry Brigade (less one and a half battalions) 4th Brigade, R.F.A., 13th Brigade, R.F.A. (less two and one-third batteries), 60th and 61st Howitzer Battery (less one section), 23rd Mountain Battery (less one section) and four field ambulances.

In each group the first line transport was to accompany its unit and the field ambulances were to march with the troops. The ammunition columns and remaining transport were to form up in rear of the rendezvous under escort of a battalion of the 37th Brigade and the 20th and 21st Sapper Companies.*

The leading group under General Kemball, followed by the other two, the whole forming a column about two miles long, was to move off from the rendezvous at 9 p.m. marching on a magnetic bearing of 206°. On reaching a point, about six miles distant from the rendezvous and some four and a half miles east-north-east of the Dujaila redoubt, which will be referred to hereafter as the point of divergence, the whole column was to halt and then to divide. The first two groups were to continue for another four and a half miles in a south-

* The 21st Company had with them two " Bipartite " pontoons loaded on four G.S. wagons for use in crossing the Hai or the Tigris.

westerly direction so as to reach the western corner of the southernmost bend in the Dujaila depression before 6.15 a.m. on the 8th. At this point, which was some two and a half miles southward of the Dujaila redoubt and which was the position of deployment for General Kemball's group, Column B was to form up by 6.15 a.m. in readiness to assault the Dujaila redoubt,* while Column A (which was not to join in the assault on the redoubt) was to advance against some Turkish trenches to the north-west and to cover the left flank of Column B.† The Cavalry Brigade was to move out still further to the left to cover the flank of the two columns and to send a patrol to report on the ford over the Hai at Hamidiya.

General Keary, commanding Column C, was to arrange for the movement from the point of divergence of the whole of Column C to admit of their taking up the following positions and rôles by 6.15 a.m. The artillery were to be ready to open fire from positions (to be selected by the Brigadier-General, Royal Artillery) about 3,500 yards distant from the line Dujaila–Sinn Abtar redoubts and would then, as Corps Artillery, come under the direct orders of General Aylmer. Two battalions of the 37th Infantry Brigade under General Fowler, with half a battalion in reserve, were to be in a position due east, and within effective machine gun range, of the Dujaila redoubt and would also then come under General Aylmer's direct orders. General Fowler was to co-operate with the assault of General Kemball's column by pushing in two of his battalions to within five hundred yards of the Dujaila redoubt. One of the infantry brigades of General Keary's 3rd Division was to be in a position of readiness to assault the Sinn Abtar redoubt, i.e., with its front line and machine guns within effective machine gun range of the enemy's line ;‡ and the remaining brigade of General Keary's division was to be formed up as a reserve on the right of the Corps Artillery.

The attack was divided into phases and special instructions in great detail were issued to the Corps Artillery for each of these. During the first phase the guns were to register on to the Dujaila and Sinn Abtar redoubts, the trenches between these redoubts and the hostile artillery ; and then to support

* General Kemball was instructed verbally that he was to start the assault as soon as he was ready to do so, without further orders.

† Column A was designated to advance on the Maqasis ferry after the Dujaila and Sinn Abtar redoubts had been captured.

‡ Subsequently this brigade was instructed not to make its attack until General Kemball's troops had captured the Dujaila redoubt and had reached the bend in the Dujaila depression north of that redoubt.

General Kemball's attack by shelling the Dujaila redoubt and adjacent trenches with a gradually increasing rate of fire as the attack developed.

The ammunition columns and second line transport were to leave the rendezvous at 5.30 a.m. on the 8th March and move to the point of divergence, being guarded on their northern flank by the 35th Brigade group, which was to move off from its screening position at 6 a.m.

General Aylmer would receive reports up to 5 a.m. on the 8th at the head of Column C and after that hour at a position on the left of the Corps Artillery.

The orders also dealt with the action to be taken by the different formations after the capture of the Dujaila redoubt, but as these were not brought into operation they do not directly concern this narrative.

In addition to the operation orders summarised above, a series of carefully drawn up orders and instructions regarding the concentration, the night march and various administrative details were issued between the 2nd and 6th March. The troops were to carry two days' cooked rations on the man and, in addition, one day's ration (two days for Column A) on the first line transport.

The Air Force, whose total number of available machines on the 7th was nine,* received instructions to ward off hostile aircraft on the 7th to prevent their observing the British dispositions.

A great part of the force detailed for the night march of the 7th/8th March was by the 6th already on the Tigris right bank; but several units and formations had still to cross from the left bank, and, to prevent observation by the enemy, they moved after dark on the night of the 6th/7th. Thus many men got little or no rest that night or the ensuing day.†

General Kemball had been informed at the end of February that he was to command the force making the outflanking attack and, though he did not receive a copy of the operation orders till the 6th March, he ascertained some days before this the general outline of the plan from the Corps staff. In view of what he learned, General Kemball obtained an interview with General Gorringe at which he represented that, con-

* Four aeroplanes R.F.C.; two aeroplanes R.N.A.S.; three seaplanes R.N.A.S., Many of these machines were in an indifferent state, owing to climate, exposure and hard wear and tear.

† Particularly the 28th Infantry Brigade, which began crossing the Tigris bridge at 8 p.m. on the 6th and did not all reach their bivouac till after 5 a.m. on the 7th.

sidering the size and composition of the force, it would be better to concentrate at the rendezvous before dark so as to obviate delay and confusion. General Gorringe was, however, unable to agree. He said that this point had been settled after very full discussion and that the only way to maintain the necessary secrecy was to allow no movement before dusk. General Kemball was given an improvised staff to assist him, but the officers appointed did not join him till the 6th, which gave him and them little time to study their task or to make the acquaintance of each other and of the troops composing the force.

General Aylmer has been criticised for not assigning the rôle of the flanking attack to the one complete division he had on the right bank, namely, to General Keary with his 3rd Division. His reason was that General Keary, who had other ideas of how success could best be attained, had expressed disagreement with General Aylmer's proposed plan; and General Kemball appeared to General Aylmer to be eminently suitable for the post, having regard to his past work in Mesopotamia and his local experience.*

At 2 p.m. on the 7th March General Aylmer held a conference at which his intentions were explained to the subordinate commanders by General Gorringe, who emphasised the fact that it was hoped to surprise the enemy and that, as delay or hesitation in the attack would give the Turks time to push in their reserve and reinforcements, it was essential that the capture of the Dujaila redoubt should be pushed through with the greatest vigour. General Aylmer also addressed the conference, summarising the situation and strongly representing the necessity for dash in the impending operations. At this conference General Kemball objected to the inclusion of so much transport among the fighting troops in the column and he received permission to eliminate as much as he considered necessary and to let them march in rear. But though he issued orders to his troops to that effect as soon as the conference was over, he was too late; and he found on his arrival at the rendezvous that practically the whole of the transport and field ambulances were formed up as ordered originally. Not wishing to delay the start, General Kemball then decided that he would send some of the animals and vehicles out of the column, to march in rear, at the point of divergence.

Sunset on the 7th March was at about 6 p.m., and though most of the units had only from two to four miles to march to

* Before he had been wounded, General Gorringe had been designated for the command of this flanking attack.

reach the rendezvous, a great part of the artillery had to cover between five and seven miles.* Careful arrangements had been made, with a system of screened and coloured lights, to guide the troops in the dark to their positions at the rendezvous, where most of them, leaving their bivouacs as darkness fell, arrived without difficulty by 8.30 p.m. But some of the artillery, with a longer way to go, were much delayed and the last of them did not arrive till 9.50 p.m.

The effective fighting strength of the force on the right bank, which was to take part in the advance, was 1,268 sabres, 18,891 rifles and 68 guns ; and accompanying it were a considerable number of personnel belonging to the administrative services. The formations adopted by the different units were as laid down in the operation orders.†

The main idea which governed General Aylmer in drawing up his somewhat complicated plan was the necessity, if he was to join hands effectively with the garrison of Kut, for a decisive victory. The only chance of effecting a surprise was by making a night march to bring his force into position to attack by dawn. The Turkish position was strongly entrenched except for the line between the Dujaila redoubt and the Hai, and the Turks had begun to entrench this part some three days before the attack. General Aylmer, however, had reason to believe that, owing to the difficulty of drinking water, the Turkish right was not very strongly held.

The preliminary movements of units to reach the rendezvous had, in General Aylmer's opinion, to be carried out after dusk to ensure the necessary secrecy ; but the difficulties which some of the artillery would have to overcome in working up to time owing to their distance from the rendezvous seem to have been underestimated.‡ The formation for the march of the whole force in one column might be open to objection, but it would offer less chance of part of the force going astray. For the same reason he had ordered, contrary to the usual procedure, the inclusion in the infantry columns of artillery, field ambulances and transport animals.§ As mentioned above, his agreement to General Kemball's modification of this arrangement proved to be too late.

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* For positions and distances, see Map 17.

† See Annexure A to Appendix XXIV.

‡ General Kemball told the Mesopotamia Commission that he had mentioned this point to General Gorringe at his interview on the 2nd March.

§ As an additional precaution General Aylmer ordered the pack mules to be led by soldiers.

The distances to be covered from the rendezvous to the positions of deployment, varying from six to ten and a half miles, were certainly long, but there was no way of reducing them. These distances were, however, taken into consideration in determining the subsequent action of the different columns; General Kemball's brigades with the longer march being given the first objective, while General Keary's brigades, which were designated to push on after the capture of the Sinn Abtar redoubt, would have a rest before and during General Kemball's attack.

General Aylmer calculated on surprising the Turks by General Kemball's attack on the Dujaila redoubt and on his then being able with no great difficulty to render the trenches from there to the Sinn Abtar redoubt untenable by the enemy. If the Turks decided to stay and fight it was probable that they would send reserves and reinforcements from Maqasis and the left bank of the Tigris towards their right. To meet this contingency and confirm success, General Aylmer held ready the 7th and 8th Infantry Brigades, while to meet the possibility of a Turkish counter-attack against his right and rear he retained the 35th Infantry Brigade under his own orders.

The orders and instructions for the advance and assault had been drawn out under General Aylmer's orders after considerable discussion and careful consideration of all determining factors. They were purposely drawn out in some detail and left little to the initiative of subordinate commanders; for General Aylmer considered that careful co-ordinating orders were necessary to ensure proper co-operation by the different parts of his force; more especially as he felt that in his three previous actions his delegation of too great initiative to his subordinate commanders had conduced to his lack of success and that those operations had shown the necessity for ensuring better co-operation between the different parts of his force, in which many of the officers and men were wanting in knowledge and training for the class of warfare in which they were engaged.

The night of the 7th March proved to be fine, clear and starlit, with a fairly warm temperature. But owing to the late arrival of the artillery, the force did not commence its advance from the rendezvous until 10.22 p.m.

The force was led and guided by Captain K. Mason, R.E., assisted by a small staff who checked the dead reckoning with a bicycle wheel, three pedometers and an improvised

pace-stick. At the head of the force, the leading battalion of Column A (26th Punjabis) moved in line of half-company columns in fours; General Kemball with his headquarters marched on the left and directing flank of the second battalion of the 36th Brigade; and behind came Column B in front of the Cavalry Brigade, which was followed by General Aylmer with his advanced headquarters and then by Column C under General Keary.

A few short halts were found to be necessary in the first half-hour; and at midnight, when about three miles had been covered, General Kemball made a ten minutes halt, and then received orders from Corps headquarters not to advance again without permission as Column C had lost touch. At 1 a.m. orders were received to resume the advance and the march was continued without a halt until the point of divergence was reached by the head of the column about 2.30 a.m. From this point General Kemball with his own two columns and the Cavalry Brigade was to advance independently. So far, beyond the delay of some two and a half hours due to the late start from the rendezvous and the waiting for Column C to close up,* the march had gone well.

Some two miles on, across General Kemball's route, a cavalry reconnaissance had encountered, some days previously, an entrenchment occupied by the enemy; and from subsequent air reports it appeared to have been extended. To deal with this effectively, the commanders of the two leading brigades had represented that it was necessary to deploy their leading battalions into two lines; and this had been agreed to by General Aylmer. In accordance with General Kemball's orders, the leading battalions of the 36th and 9th Brigades each formed up at the point of divergence into two lines with a frontage of 150 yards; and the battalions in rear formed up behind them in lines of company columns in fours. This movement was successfully carried out without much difficulty in spite of the darkness.

At this point also, General Kemball sent staff officers to get a great part of the mule transport and field ambulances out of the column, with orders that they were to remain with the transport of Column C at the point of divergence until daylight; as he was afraid of a stampede of animals in the dark when the hostile entrenchment two miles on was assaulted. The elimina-

* Column C had not lost touch but had been stopped by the transport immediately in front of them, which appears to have made several unauthorised halts.

tion of this transport proved, however, to be a difficult matter, as the transport drivers were so heavily asleep that it was not easy to awaken them or to keep them from going to sleep again when left; and in spite of great exertions by the whole of General Kemball's staff there was considerable delay, which prevented the resumption of the advance till 3.55 a.m. But General Kemball learnt just before his advance from one of the Corps staff that Column C transport was not going to halt there after all and he consequently decided to let his transport accompany him. In point of fact some of this transport, their drivers again overcome by sleep, did remain behind.*

The hostile entrenchment when encountered was found to be unoccupied but, being five feet deep, was too great an obstacle for the column to cross. The scouts of the 26th Punjabis moved south for about 150 yards and got round it, but a gap in the trench line some thirty yards wide was found for the column to pass through. This, however, necessitated reducing the front of the column and further delay occurred before all had negotiated it. In consequence, it was not until 5.10 a.m. that the head of the column struck the Dujaila depression just beyond the entrenchment, at a distance of about one and a half miles from the point of divergence.† Here a short halt was necessary to make certain that it was the depression (which was very shallow here), to allow the troops in rear to close up and to change the direction of the advance to a bearing of 238°. There still remained a distance of about three miles to be traversed to General Kemball's position of deployment, so it was clear that he could not reach it by the appointed time.

About 5.30 a.m., after the resumption of the advance, lights of Arab encampments were observed on both flanks, but General Kemball could not afford to delay and merely pushed out protective guards to either flank. The first signs of dawn appeared about 5.45 a.m. and three-quarters of an hour later, when it was quite light, the head of the column reached what was taken to be the bend in the depression, i.e., the position of deployment. Soon, however, it was found that an embankment across the depression had been taken for the bank turning northward, and that the head of the column was actually some 1,500 yards short of the corner.

* Escort for the transport and artillery of Column B was formed by the Provisional Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.

† Two miles according to the maps then current, but only one and a half miles in the subsequently issued survey sheets.

The Dujaila redoubt was plainly visible some 4,000 yards to the north-west and to many of the force it appeared as if the Turks had no idea of the presence of the British force. So clear did this seem to be to Colonel Walton, commanding the leading battalion (26th Punjabis), that he continued to advance, reporting his reasons to his brigade commander, General Christian, who at once moved up with his Brigade-Major to the head of the advanced guard to see for himself. General Christian could see no sign of Turkish activity and a solitary Turkish vedette in the middle distance had obviously no suspicion of the presence of the British force. Also coming to the conclusion that the Turks had been completely surprised, General Christian confirmed Colonel Walton's order to continue the advance and he himself returned to General Kemball to report.*

General Kemball, however, did not agree. In practically every action he had seen in Mesopotamia it had appeared as if the trenches were empty until the Turks actually opened a heavy fire from them. Moreover, his past experience in the country had shown him that to start an attack before the brigade and battalion commanders had time and opportunity to get the bearings of their objectives was likely to lead to loss of direction and disconnected attacks. He consequently ordered General Christain to recall the 26th Punjabis.

Between General Kemball and the Turkish trenches was a bare open plain, the only conspicuous features, besides the Dujaila and Sinn Abtar redoubts and the shrine of Imam al Mansur, being a line of sandhills marking the northern bank of a former large irrigation canal which ran eastward for some miles from the vicinity of the Dujaila redoubt. The vulnerable target which his force—troops and transport together in a dense formation on the open plain—offered to the hostile artillery at effective range struck General Kemball forcibly; and, momentarily expecting the Turkish guns to open fire on them, he ordered the whole of his force to take cover at once in the depression—at this point some fifteen feet deep in the centre—while he made arrangements for the necessary deployment.

The night march had been very well carried out. The work of the guiding staff and the march discipline of the troops

* Many British officers were subsequently told by the Turks that they had been entirely surprised. General Lake gave the author an instance of this when a Turkish officer, during an armistice at Kut after its surrender, told one of his staff the same thing and said that the whole Turkish force was asleep till wakened by the British guns. The Turkish General staff also confirm this and say that the surprise was due to neglect of duty by their cavalry.

had both been excellent; but the delays which had taken place made it impossible to carry out the deployment of General Kemball's force under cover of darkness, as had been arranged; and this proved to be most unfortunate.

At 6.35 a.m. General Kemball sent the following message to Corps headquarters: "We have succeeded in reaching bend of Dujaila depression apparently unperceived and are forming up troops while brigadiers reconnoitre and arrange deployment. This may take an hour." By 7 a.m. the whole column was under cover in the depression and the brigade and battalion commanders were taking their bearings. The 36th Brigade was about half a mile short of the corner of the bend, with the 9th and 28th Brigades behind it to the eastward.

In the meantime, Column C, which did not reach the point of divergence till 4.40 a.m., had been carrying out its orders, modified as to timing by the delays in the night march. By 6.30 a.m. the artillery had taken up positions roughly eastward of, and some 4,000 yards distant from, the Dujaila redoubt. The 37th Brigade, reduced by the detachment of the half battalion 34th Pioneers as escort to Corps headquarters to a strength of two battalions, moved off on a bearing of 250° and by 7 a.m. was well on its way to its position about eight hundred yards south-east of the Dujaila redoubt. Taking up a frontage here of four hundred yards about half an hour later, the brigade remained in readiness to support the attack of General Kemball's infantry with rifle and machine gun fire. The 7th Brigade followed, marching on a bearing of 258°, and by 7 a.m. had established itself in a position which they estimated was 1,400 yards east of the Dujaila redoubt but which they subsequently found to be much farther off. They also remained in readiness to support by fire the advance of General Kemball's infantry. Two battalions of the 8th Brigade moved out to protect the northern flank of the artillery, the remaining two battalions being retained in reserve by General Keary, whose headquarters were just north of the guns.

General Aylmer took up his headquarters on a mound south of the artillery position, whence he was able to get as good a view of the battlefield as was possible in such country. With him was General Gorringe who, though unable to ride owing to his wound, carried out the duties of Chief of Staff.

Since 6.30 a.m. the Dujaila and Sinn Abtar redoubts had been clearly distinguishable, but there were no signs of enemy activity.

The Turkish dispositions before 7 a.m., as far as they can be gathered from Kiesling's account, from information given by the Turkish General Staff and from verbal Turkish narratives to different British officers, were somewhat as follows. In the advanced position at Bait Isa–Chahela was one regiment of the 35th Division (1,000 rifles) with the remaining two regiments of the division (2,000 rifles) holding the Es Sinn position from the Tigris to, and including, the Dujaila redoubt. Guarding the right flank of the Es Sinn position and possibly holding some of the trenches between the Dujaila redoubt and the Hai was the Turkish Cavalry Brigade, or part of it, and Arab irregulars; their camp being south-west of the redoubt. In the Dujaila area were four battalions of the 2nd Division (1st and 5th Regiments), some distance behind the Turkish line; and at the Hai bridge and in its vicinity were three more battalions of this division.* On the left bank of the Tigris about the Es Sinn position was the 51st Division (4,000 rifles); the 45th Division (about 3,000 rifles) was investing Kut; and the 52nd Division (4,000 rifles) was holding the Hanna trenches. The strengths are generally as indicated by Kiesling, who says that the long pause in the operations from January till March had much lessened the battle efficiency of the Turks on the Tigris by the reduction in their numbers caused by epidemic disease and by their exertions in the bad weather under indifferent conditions; and he also says that there was almost a complete failure to send them reinforcements.

At 7 a.m., by which time General Aylmer was in telephonic communication with his subordinate generals, it appeared to him that the Turks could hardly have failed to discern from their commanding redoubts the Corps Artillery and British infantry brigades eastward of their position. All chance of a surprise being over, in his opinion, and expecting from General Kemball's 6.35 a.m. message that his infantry would start their attack in half an hour, General Aylmer ordered the Corps Artillery to open fire. This they did at about 7 a.m., firing on the Turkish camp southward of the Dujaila redoubt and on the redoubt itself. The apparent confusion that ensued in the Turkish camp seemed to many British observers to confirm the opinion already formed that they had surprised the Turks. In this bombardment, according to German and Turkish accounts, the commander of the irregular cavalry with the Turks, Fazl Pasha,† was killed, whereupon his men

* The third regiment of the 2nd Division had, it is understood, been diverted to Persia from Baghdad.

† Otherwise known as Muhammad Pasha Daghestani.

fled in confusion towards the Hai. This is borne out by the fugitives in this direction seen by the British. Turkish guns, however, soon came into action against the British artillery; but their fire had very little effect, being wild, slight in volume and inaccurate. Few Turks could be seen in the redoubts or trenches and beyond a little rifle shooting, which did not last long, at the advancing infantry of the British 37th Brigade, Turkish troops in the position seemed to British officers eastward of the Turkish trenches to be either taking little action or to be very few in number.

To General Kemball and the officers with him more signs of Turkish movement were apparent. Scattered bodies of Turkish and Arab cavalry could be seen galloping away in a south-westerly direction from the Turkish camp and small parties of Turkish infantry were seen to move from the vicinity of the Dujaila redoubt into apparently outlying trenches. General Kemball now gave his own artillery permission to register. The 8th Battery, R.F.A., came into action in the depression near the position of the 36th Infantry Brigade about 7.15 a.m. and, firing at the Turkish camp near the redoubt, added to the confusion there; but the remaining batteries except the 20th took a little time to extricate themselves from the infantry column in the depression and to register on the Dujaila redoubt preparatory to covering the infantry advance. The 20th Battery, R.F.A., and most of the battery ammunition wagons still remained among the infantry in the depression.

At 7.30 General Kemball informed Corps headquarters that the 36th Infantry Brigade were forming up under cover at the bend of the depression to attack their allotted objective; that the 9th Infantry Brigade were about to form up to attack the Dujaila redoubt and would be followed by the 28th Infantry Brigade echeloned to their left; that one artillery battery was shelling the Turkish camp while the remainder were about to open fire on the redoubt; and that he had asked the Cavalry Brigade to protect his flank and rear and to ascertain if the Turkish trenches south-west of the redoubt were occupied.* This message was interpreted by General Aylmer to mean that General Kemball's attack was just starting.

General Kemball's orders had been issued verbally to his subordinate commanders. The 36th Infantry Brigade, supported

* The war diaries mention the orders to protect the flank and rear, but none of them say anything about the request to ascertain if the trenches were occupied; and it does not seem that this was done.

by the 8th Battery,* was to attack the Turkish trenches lying about two miles south-west of the redoubt, the right of the attack being directed on Imam al Mansur. After clearing these trenches, the 36th Brigade, which was to keep in touch with, and cover the left flank of, the brigades attacking the redoubt, was to swing northwards in readiness for a further advance. The 9th Infantry Brigade was to deploy on a front of six hundred yards and with its right on the western bank of the depression, which it was warned not to enter or cross, was to advance against the redoubt. The 28th Brigade was to follow in echelon on the left of the 9th Brigade on a frontage of four hundred yards so as to support but not join in its assault, which was to be supported by the whole of General Kemball's artillery except the 8th Battery, R.F.A.

General Christian was ordered not to start the advance of his 36th Brigade till the 9th and 28th Brigades closed up to him; but this took time, as the difficulty of sorting out the transport, artillery wagons and field ambulances in the limited space of the depression was increased by the tired state of men and animals. In fact so long did it take that General Christian and Colonel Campbell (commanding 9th Brigade) went to see General Kemball about 8 a.m. and, representing the danger attending further delay, asked permission to start their advance at once. General Kemball, however, was unable to approve a start until his arrangements were complete. He had just ordered the 28th Brigade to move along the depression past the 9th Brigade so as to get into a better position for deployment, and this move, which was completed by 8.30, was then in progress.

At 8.55 a.m. General Kemball reported to Corps headquarters that at 8.40 the 36th Brigade attack was starting from the depression and that the 28th Brigade was moving out to get into position to support the 9th Brigade, which was following the 28th along the depression. This message—from which General Aylmer believed that the attack had started—crossed one sent at 8.30 by General Aylmer, who was getting anxious at the delay, saying that the 37th and 7th Brigades were in their allotted positions and ordering General Kemball to push on. This he could not do as he found that the deployment of the infantrymen from the depression took some time; to avoid presenting a good target to the hostile artillery, they had to emerge in successive parties.

* This battery was drawn out of action at 7.30, fire having been opened in the meantime by the 28th Battery (9th Brigade, R.F.A.).

At 9.40 General Kemball heard the results of the British aeroplane reconnaissances carried out between 7 and 9 a.m. Opposite Maqasis on the left bank of the Tigris were 2,000 men, who were evidently beginning to be ferried across the Tigris in fourteen pontoons and twelve *bellums*, and 1,000 more men were moving to the same position from the northward. The Turkish positions north of Kut were well occupied; troops had fallen in at Shumran and 500 were moving from there towards the Turkish bridge over the Tigris; and about two squadrons of cavalry were moving from this bridge towards the Hai bridge, where there were 1,200 men. At 8.45 a.m. 400 men were seen moving, four miles north-east of the Hai bridge, towards the Dujaila redoubt along the line of Turkish trenches where digging was in progress; a column of eighteen companies were moving from Maqasis towards the Dujaila redoubt, the head of the column being then about three miles west-north-west of the redoubt; and 1,000 men were behind the Es Sinn position about two miles south of the Tigris. The aeroplanes further reported that the British artillery fire against the Dujaila redoubt was accurate, some of the shells going over, but none short.

From the above and Kiesling's account it is possible to get an approximate idea of the Turkish dispositions at this stage of the battle. Kiesling says that on hearing of the British advance against his right—which verbal Turkish accounts to British officers, since confirmed by the Turkish General Staff, said was after the British artillery had opened fire—the Turkish Commander, Halil Bey, withdrew the infantry regiment of the 35th Division from the advanced positions Bait Isa–Chahela and sent it to strengthen his right; that he ordered the battalions of the 2nd Division to move up to strengthen his right and guard the right flank, which had been uncovered by the retreat of his cavalry and Arab irregulars; and that he started to ferry the 51st Division from the left to the right bank of the Tigris at Maqasis. The column of eighteen companies seen by the British aeroplanes probably consisted of the four battalions of the 2nd Division with two machine gun or engineer companies. The two bodies seen near Maqasis and being ferried over were undoubtedly the 51st Division; and the 1,000 men behind the Es Sinn position may well have been the regiment of the 35th Division withdrawn from Bait Isa–Chahela. The troops seen at and near Shumran cannot at present be identified; those digging on the trench line between Dujaila redoubt and the Hai and the 400 moving

along it belonged probably to the 2nd or 35th Divisions; and the movement of cavalry from Shumran to the Hai bridge seems to show that only part of the Cavalry Brigade had been in the Es Sinn position.

In drawing a comparison between this fight and one that took place about a year later, Muhammad Amin, the Turkish historian, says of the Turkish position about this time: "The situation of the XIII Corps was truly serious. In rear was the besieged army of General Townshend ready to attack and numbering 6,000–7,000 men and 40 Q.F. guns.* On the left was the Tigris which could only be passed at the Maqasis crossing by a pontoon and fifteen rafts and boats. On the right was the Shatt al Hai which could be passed by a light bridge only." †

At 9.35 a.m. General Christian's 36th Brigade started its advance in the Imam al Mansur direction. The 82nd and 26th Punjabis formed the first line on a frontage of six hundred yards, followed at a distance of one thousand yards by the second line, consisting of the 1/6th Devonshire and a company 62nd Punjabas,‡ while the brigaded machine guns moved on the left flank. Just after they started, the Turks, large numbers of whom were seen moving into trenches southward of the Dujaila redoubt, opened a heavy rifle fire.

At 9.45 a.m. the 9th Brigade commenced their advance northward against the redoubt. In first line were the 1/1st Gurkhas and 93rd Infantry on a frontage of six hundred yards, the Gurkhas on the right directing their advance along the western bank of the depression. The 1/9th Gurkhas followed in second line and the 1/Highland Light Infantry in reserve. At 10 a.m. the 28th Brigade followed in echelon on the left, their first line composed of the 53rd Sikhs and 56th Rifles on a frontage of four hundred yards, with the 51st Sikhs and 2/Leicestershire following in second line.

Opposition to the 9th Brigade strengthened as they advanced, and by 10.40 a.m. the enemy infantry had so extended their front that the 93rd Infantry, reinforced by part of the 1/9th

* At Mosul, in 1918, a Turkish staff officer who had been present at the battle told a British staff officer that, at first on the morning of the 8th March, the Turkish divisional commander at Maqasis was inclined to withdraw, being very apprehensive of an attack by the Kut garrison.

† "Baghdad and the Story of its Last Fall," by Captain Muhammad Amin Bey, General Staff, late Director of the Intelligence Bureau, Sixth Army of Iraq. (Translated under direction of the General Staff, India, by Captain G. O. De R. Channer, M.C., 7th Gurkha Rifles).

‡ This battalion, being very weak, was organised in only two companies and one of these provided the escort for the 8th Battery, R.F.A.

Gurkhas, were checked by heavy rifle and machine gun fire from their left front. On the right of the brigade the 1/1st Gurkhas had sent a company to the east side of the depression to meet a movement of enemy infantry who had taken up positions on a line running eastward from their main line across the depression and on its eastern bank. This enemy movement appeared to threaten an outflanking counter-attack and to guard against it Colonel Campbell, commanding the brigade, ordered the machine guns of the Highland Light Infantry and of the 1/9th Gurkhas, with small escorts, to the eastern side of the depression. Shortly before this General Kemball, who had established his headquarters about 1,500 yards east of the southernmost corner of the depression, had received a message from the 37th Brigade, sent off at 9.3 a.m., that they were in position on the west ridge of the depression and about seven hundred yards from the Dujaila redoubt, where the enemy could still be seen. A party of Turks thus intervened directly between the 9th and 37th Brigades and this seems to have had the unfortunate result that at times during the day some of the fire of the 37th Brigade fell on the 9th and 28th Brigades as well as on the enemy. In face of strong opposition and in spite of severe losses the 9th Brigade managed to make some further progress, causing the enemy to retire somewhat, until about 11.30 a.m., when, the Highland Light Infantry still being in reserve, the average distance of the brigade first line from the hostile trenches was five hundred yards.

The advance of the 28th Brigade at first met with little opposition, and at 10.40 a.m. Colonel Elsmie, its commander, in giving his position reported to General Kemball that he had no report from the front line, but the enemy appeared to be retiring.* But shortly afterwards a body of Turks, occupying trenches about 1,400 yards to the front, opened a heavy rifle and machine gun fire on the brigade. Colonel Elsmie's infantry continued, however, to advance steadily, forcing the Turks to retire from two or three positions, until about 11.45 a.m. The brigade firing line was then about level with that of the 9th Brigade, their casualties had been heavy and the Turkish opposition had so strengthened that the firing line was checked at about five hundred yards distance from the Turkish position. Colonel Elsmie then sent off a message to General Kemball, giving his situation and suggesting that the 36th Brigade should advance to co-operate on his left. It is noteworthy

* Some of the enemy had been seen to leave the Dujaila redoubt.

that up to this time neither the 9th, 28th or 36th Brigades had been under fire from hostile artillery and that the artillery supporting the advance of the 9th and 28th Brigades had been firing on the Dujaila redoubt and adjacent trenches and not on the trenches or enemy immediately opposing these two brigades.

The situation reports from the 9th and 28th Brigades between 10 and 11 a.m. showed the headquarters of both brigades to be in the same position. To clear up this point General Kemball, who could see nothing of his infantry situation from his own position, got into telephonic communication with 28th Brigade headquarters and asked where the 9th Brigade headquarters were ; he also suggested to Colonel Elsmie's brigade-major that he (General Kemball) should come up to 28th Brigade headquarters to see the situation personally. The brigade-major, however, replied that he had not seen the 9th Brigade headquarters and did not know where they were ; that he himself could see nothing and he strongly advised General Kemball not to come up as the hostile fire was very heavy and he would be no better off as regards observation of the infantry fight.

The 36th Brigade, supported at first by the fire of the 8th Battery, R.F.A., and then by that of the 20th Battery, R.F.A., as well—both batteries moving forward about a mile westward of the position of deployment—and keeping in touch with the 28th Brigade, had made good progress in spite of considerable hostile rifle and machine gun fire ; and by 11.30 a.m. they occupied the trenches which were their objective and which the enemy evacuated before their final advance. The greater part of the right battalion of the brigade (82nd Punjabis) had, however, been drawn away to their right front by hostile fire and were closely engaged with the enemy to the left of the 28th Brigade.

The Cavalry Brigade had been covering the flank and rear of General Kemball's force and, its horse artillery guns having forced two squadrons of Turkish cavalry to retire, was now watching the Hai bridge from a position about two miles to the south-west of the 36th Brigade.

At 11 a.m. it seemed to General Kemball that the attack was proceeding satisfactorily and at that hour he sent a report to Corps headquarters giving the reported positions of his three infantry brigades and saying that the two leading battalions of the 9th Brigade were hotly engaged with trenches some five hundred yards to their front. He concluded his message

"Artillery forward observers report some backward movement of Turks from Dujaila redoubt and new trenches.* Transport also seen moving west."

This message reached General Aylmer about half an hour later and seemed to confirm the view gathered from previous reports from other parts of the force that the Turks were inclined to retire. For instance, at 9.50 a.m. the 37th Brigade had reported that the Dujaila redoubt appeared to be only lightly held, and this had been confirmed by Major Leachman of the Political Staff, who had been reconnoitring towards the redoubt with some of his Arabs; a patrol of the 8th Infantry Brigade reported at 10.45 a.m. that there was constant enemy movement northward from the Dujaila redoubt and westward from the Sinn Abtar redoubt, but apparently little or no movement in the opposite directions; and patrols from the 7th Infantry Brigade also reported a considerable stream of movement northward from the Dujaila redoubt.

At 11.20 a.m. General Aylmer asked General Kemball if his right brigades required any further artillery assistance, and at 11.45 a.m. sent a further message, referring to the one sent by General Kemball at 11 a.m., asking if the 9th Brigade could not be pushed in to seize the Dujaila redoubt, as the 37th Brigade had been waiting for some three hours in their allotted position to co-operate with this assault. It is clear from this message that General Aylmer did not realise that the 9th Brigade was still some 2,000 yards away from the redoubt.

At 11.40 a.m. General Kemball, in answer to the Corps headquarter enquiry of 11.20, said that he did not think his right brigades specially required more artillery support but that he would enquire. The records do not show how or when this enquiry was made; but it appears that Colonel Elsmie about this time sent a message to General Kemball, which the latter never received, saying that he was getting no support from the artillery whose fire was directed entirely against the Dujaila redoubt. At 12 noon, on receiving General Aylmer's request to push in the 9th Brigade attack, General Kemball sent his senior General Staff Officer† to visit 9th Brigade headquarters and ascertain the situation. Five minutes later General Kemball received a message from the 9th Brigade showing that by 11.45 a.m. their firing line had got within four hundred yards of the enemy, who appeared to be evacuating some of his trenches, and that the brigade

* i.e., those to the south-west of the redoubt.
† Major H. S. Moberly.

still had its reserve battalion in hand. At 12.15 General Kemball informed Corps headquarters that the 9th Brigade advance had been delayed by enemy trenches on its left flank and by enemy counter-attacks; that he was sending a staff officer to ascertain the situation and organise the advance and on his return would send a further report; that the 28th Brigade, whose right battalion was about a mile from the Dujaila redoubt, reported the enemy on their left front as having retired; and that the 36th Brigade was moving to support the left of the 28th Brigade.

As regards the last sentence of the above message General Christian, after capturing his objective with his 36th Brigade, began to reorganise his rather extended line for a further northerly advance against the Dujaila depression, where enemy infantry were in position firing; but at 12 noon he received a message from General Kemball asking if he could assist the 28th Brigade by advancing on their left. To make the required change of direction, i.e., to face the Dujaila redoubt, General Christian found it necessary, owing to the fire of the enemy to the north, to withdraw his line for about a mile to the south-eastward to reform. The greater part of the 82nd Punjabis were, however, so closely engaged far on the right that they did not take part in this withdrawal.

The Turkish force opposing the 9th, 28th and 36th Brigades appears, from Kiesling's account, to have consisted mainly of the 3,000 infantry of the 1st and 5th Regiments of the 2nd Division, with machine guns. Kiesling says that they lost their way over unknown ground to reinforce their right, went beyond the flank and suddenly came upon the British encircling columns, which they at once attacked and repulsed. Kiesling himself was not present at the battle and it is not clear what he means by flank, especially in view of the outstanding eminence of the Dujaila redoubt and the reinforcing movements seen by our officers and men southward of that redoubt; but it seems possible that the Turks mistook General Christian's withdrawal for an enforced retirement. There seems little doubt, however, that the whole or greater part of the four battalions of the 2nd Division were in the trenches southward and south-west of the Dujaila redoubt.

At 12.30 p.m. General Kemball repeated to Corps headquarters a message from Colonel Campbell saying that the 9th Brigade would be ready to assault the Dujaila redoubt about 1 p.m. and that he would wire the exact time at which he would want intense artillery support. In point of fact

this message gave a totally wrong impression of the situation, being based on incorrect information from the 1/1st Gurkhas. They had reported to 9th Brigade headquarters that their firing line was only about five hundred yards from the Dujaila redoubt, which seemed to be only lightly held, and that with reinforcements they could easily take it. Accordingly, about 1 p.m., Colonel Campbell ordered the Highland Light Infantry to reinforce the Gurkhas and carry them forward to the assault. On arriving at the Gurkha headquarters, however, the officer commanding the Highland Light Infantry found that a mistake had been made and that the Gurkhas were 1,500 yards or more away from the redoubt.

About this time a large body of Arabs was seen some distance to the westward, and on being shelled by General Kemball's artillery retired towards the Hai bridge. About 1 p.m. the British Cavalry Brigade, with the horse artillery, advancing towards the Hai bridge, by their fire from a position about a mile north of Hamidiya drove some enemy infantry out of trenches near Imam al Mansur and also fired at Turkish cavalry retiring south on the Hai bridge. But they were themselves forced to retire by shell fire which seemed to them to come from our own artillery. Whether the two incidents in this paragraph were really one, affording an instance of an error of vision due to the mirage which caused our artillery to fire on our own cavalry, is uncertain; but such a mistake was always possible in Mesopotamia.

At 1.25 p.m. General Kemball's staff officer returned, having had to walk most of the way owing to the heavy Turkish fire and his horse having been shot, and reported that the 9th Brigade would be ready to assault the Dujaila redoubt about 1.30 p.m. but that the commander would like three-quarters of an hour's notice before the bombardment in order to secure support from the 3rd Division. Acting on this information General Kemball reported at 1.40 p.m. to Corps headquarters that it was intended to assault the Dujaila redoubt at 2.10 p.m., after five minutes ordinary and five minutes intense artillery fire and he asked for the support of the 3rd Division and the Corps Artillery. Immediately afterwards he sent orders to the 9th, 28th and 36th Brigades to press in to the assault at 2 p.m., when a ten minutes artillery bombardment would commence.

The 9th Brigade replied "clear line" at once that assault was impossible. This General Kemball also answered at once (2.10 p.m.) telling the 9th Brigade that they must endeavour

to press the assault. We have already referred to the mistake, which was explained by the following message sent off by Colonel Campbell at 2.9 p.m., but not received by General Kemball till 2.45 :—

> "Officer commanding leading unit reports that original estimate of distance from Dujaila was very much under reality. First line is some 1,500 yards from redoubt, not 500 as originally reported. Units have lost heavily and are dead beat. Leading troops are also being fired on from east of redoubt. When your wire arrived the Highland Light Infantry had not even arrived in firing line. It was arranged verbally with your staff that we were to give you three-quarters of an hour's notice. Your wire, which was quite unexpected, arrived after 2 p.m. This wire was being written when your message arrived."

Just after 2 p.m. General Kemball received a message from Corps headquarters repeating one from the 37th Brigade which said that the left of the 1/2nd Gurkhas had advanced at 12.20 p.m., supported by two companies of the Somerset, and had occupied an enemy trench at the foot of the Dujaila redoubt on its southern side and about four hundred yards from the crest and that they could give no certain news of General Kemball's column. It appears that during the morning General Fowler and his staff had at first seen General Kemball's troops away to their left, but lost sight of them as they advanced. Eventually, about noon and after, the 37th Brigade heard the 9th Brigade attack, but from the sounds judged that the nearest part of the brigade was at least half a mile away, if not farther. A part of the Somerset moved towards the right of the 9th Brigade but could not push forward more than about four hundred yards, owing to strongly held Turkish trenches in front of them.

To make the situation clearer, the different positions of the three and a half British brigades attacking towards the Dujaila redoubt will now be given as they appear to have been just before 2 p.m. The first line of the 37th Brigade, consisting of a half-battalion 1/2nd Gurkhas, was occupying a trench some four to five hundred yards south-east of the redoubt, with a half-battalion 1/4th Somerset Light Infantry supporting them closely ; and the remainder of these two battalions were in position along the western bank of the depression at distances varying from 700 to 1,000 yards from the redoubt. The left of their line along the depression was faced with fire from enemy trenches or positions which, about the corner where

the Turkish main line bent back towards the Hai, appear to have been pushed forward in a narrow salient across and to the eastern bank of the depression.* The firing line of the 9th Brigade, consisting of the 1/1st Gurkhas, half the Highland Light Infantry (just reinforcing), the 93rd Infantry and 1/9th Gurkhas, on a frontage of about eight hundred yards, was some four to five hundred yards southward of this salient with part of the 1/1st Gurkhas on the eastern side of the depression and the left of the brigade firing line rather thrown back to face the enemy's line of trenches, which were at an angle to the brigade's direct line of advance. On the left of the 9th Brigade was the 28th Brigade, whose firing line consisted of the 53rd Sikhs and 56th Rifles, in this order from the right, with the 2/Leicestershire in support and the 51st Sikhs in reserve. The 36th Brigade, having reformed, had arrived on the left of the 28th Brigade with the 1/6th Devonshire in their first line, the 26th Punjabis and one company 62nd Punjabis in second line, and the 82nd Punjabis, whom General Christian had by this time drawn out of the fight, in third line.

On receipt of the order from General Kemball to press the assault, the right half of the 9th Brigade firing line (1/1st Gurkhas, part of 1/9th Gurkhas and Highland Light Infantry), managed with great gallantry to gain some ground during the artillery bombardment, but the left was completely checked by the very heavy hostile fire from the trenches on its left front. General Kemball's orders for the assault did not reach the 28th Brigade till 2.15 p.m., when Colonel Elsmie sent forward the Leicestershire to reinforce his firing line—53rd and 56th—with verbal instructions to the three battalions to advance simultaneously with the brigades on their right and left. Unfortunately, the Leicestershire lost their direction and eventually found themselves among the right half of the 9th Brigade firing line and were held up with them after a short advance. The 53rd and 56th, with the Devons of the 36th Brigade on their left, made a very gallant attempt at assault, but after severe losses they only managed to establish themselves within two hundred yards distance of the Turkish trenches. Owing to the misconception of the situation at Generals Kemball's and Aylmer's headquarters, the fire of the supporting British artillery† had been directed exclusively on the Dujaila redoubt instead of on the trenches which were

* In this salient the Turks appear to have found natural cover; they do not seem to have had trenches there.

† Unfortunately, the 9th Brigade, R.F.A., forward observing officer, who was with the 9th Infantry Brigade, had been killed during their advance.

stopping the advance of General Kemball's infantry, who actually never reached at this period nearer than about 1,500 yards from the redoubt. About this time the Turks made a vigorous counter-attack from the north of the salient against the left of the 37th Brigade ; but though this had some initial success against advanced portions of the Somerset, obliging them to abandon a machine gun, it was soon checked.

At 2.25 p.m., General Kemball heard from the 36th Brigade that a force of 300 Arabs was threatening their left flank, to protect which General Christian was sending a company 82nd Punjabis and machine guns. The Cavalry Brigade were asked to operate on the left flank of the 36th Brigade and at 3 p.m. advanced to do so. But they soon came under enemy shell fire from guns to the north, which had recently come into action, and were unable to gain much ground.

Coming to the conclusion that the Dujaila redoubt had not yet been captured, General Kemball suggested to Corps headquarters at 2.26 p.m. that the artillery should start a further ten minutes bombardment of the redoubt at 2.30. But this crossed a message from General Aylmer which laid down the action to be taken after the redoubt had been captured and led General Kemball to ask Corps headquarters if the redoubt had been captured and if he could push his guns on towards it. He followed this up almost immediately with another message quoting reports just received from the 9th Brigade, which showed that the brigade had lost heavily under very heavy rifle and machine gun fire, that the men were dead beat and that the brigade commander did not yet know the result of the attack. General Kemball added that he was going to push forward his artillery and accompany it himself. In point of fact, the artillery did not advance, as the artillery commander, after a personal reconnaissance, reported that no advantage would be gained by going forward as no better view could be obtained.

A little later, General Kemball sent General Aylmer, by the hand of a staff officer from Corps headquarters, the following message :—

> " . . . I find that whole of 36th Brigade is already fully committed and 28th is supporting 9th Brigade and that strong opposition is being encountered from direction of Dujaila redoubt, but the attack is progressing. The only remaining battalion in reserve is 51st Sikhs and I have told O.C. 28th Brigade to keep it in hand for the present . . . . . "

From this message it seems clear that General Kemball was still unaware of the actual situation of his infantry and therefore did not realise how far short of the redoubt they really were. At 3.15 p.m. he got a message sent by the 37th Brigade at 2.30 p.m. saying that their left was approximately seven hundred yards south-east* of the redoubt and that their Gurkhas held a trench about four hundred yards from its southern face; but that they had been unable to get into touch with the right of General Kemball's force. A few minutes later General Kemball heard from Corps headquarters (sent 3.10 p.m.) that the redoubt had not been taken and that his assault on it was being awaited. To this he replied at 3.37 that every endeavour was being made to press the assault home and to maintain the pressure.

Up to this time the 7th, 8th and 35th Infantry Brigades had taken no active part in the operations. Ascertaining during the morning from his patrols that his original position was farther from the Dujaila redoubt than he had thought, General Egerton moved his brigade (7th) forward, the 128th Pioneers, 27th Punjabis and a company 89th Punjabis with machine guns occupying about midday a position on sandhills about one thousand yards eastward of the redoubt. In this operation they only met with slight rifle and gun fire from the Turks. General Egerton had received instructions that, until the attack on the Sinn Abtar redoubt was ordered, his men were not to become engaged. So that when Turkish guns (in the direction of the Sinn Abtar redoubt), which owing to mirage could not be located and silenced by the British artillery, began about 2 p.m. to shell more heavily his leading battalions, General Egerton withdrew them for about half a mile. About midday the 8th Brigade had been moved up to a position to the right rear of the 7th Brigade in readiness to support them in an attack on the Sinn Abtar redoubt; but, soon after, General Aylmer realised that this attack could not take place for some time; and the 8th Brigade with the 23rd Mountain Battery were moved, firstly southward to the left rear of the 7th Brigade and then to a position where they could support the 37th Brigade. At the same time the 35th Brigade were told to take measures to protect the northern flank of the Corps Artillery.

Between noon and 2 p.m. General Aylmer received further information from his aeroplanes showing that a steady stream

* The message actually said south-west, an obvious mistake.

of Turkish reinforcements was being ferried across the Tigris to the right bank at Maqasis.

About 3.30 p.m. General Aylmer realised that General Kemball's attack was unable, without further support, to capture the Dujaila redoubt, but he did not know that the main opposition to their advance was really due to the Turkish trenches 1,200 to 1,500 yards southward of the redoubt. Just before 4 p.m. General Aylmer decided to send the 8th Brigade to assault the redoubt from the east with the two battalions of the 37th Brigade. This assault was to be supported by all the corps artillery and was at first ordered to take place at 4.45 p.m. General Kemball was informed of this order and was instructed to arrange for a simultaneous assault from the south by the 9th and 28th Brigades supported by every available gun. General Aylmer did not consider it wise to order the 7th Brigade also to join in this assault, as to do so would leave him with only the weak 35th Brigade to meet a Turkish counter-attack against his right flank and rear and to turn a success at the Dujaila redoubt into the decisive defeat of the Turkish force which he deemed necessary to enable him to join hands with the garrison of Kut. It appeared to General Aylmer that a Turkish counter-attack against his right flank was very probable and might, by forcing his troops to retire south of the Umm al Baram, cut him off from Wadi, where he had practically no available reserve worth mentioning.

General Kemball received General Aylmer's order to co-operate in the assault on the Dujaila redoubt at 5.10 p.m. About a quarter of an hour before this he had received messages from the 9th and 28th Brigades showing that their firing lines were still some three hundred yards from the hostile trenches, that they were meeting with very heavy opposition which had caused heavy losses, and were not at all confident of being able, even with reinforcements and strong artillery support, to capture the Dujaila redoubt. Feeling, however, that the situation demanded every possible effort, General Kemball sent them General Aylmer's order for the assault, with instructions to endeavour to carry it through and in the event of failure to arrange for battle outposts in the positions they occupied. At 4.40 p.m. General Kemball received intimation that the hour of assault had been postponed till 5.15 p.m. This had been done on the representation of General Keary, who had learnt from the 8th Brigade that the earlier hour appointed did not allow them sufficient time for the necessary preparations and advance.

General Keary visited the 8th Brigade, addressed them personally and impressed on them that their attack was to be pushed home at all costs. The two battalions of the 37th Brigade were to join in the assault, which was to be supported by the fire of the 7th Brigade.

The 8th Brigade, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Dunsford, commenced its advance from a position rather over 3,000 yards eastward of the Dujaila redoubt at 4.30 p.m. The first line, consisting of the 59th Rifles (on the right) and the 1/Manchester, moved on a frontage of seven hundred yards; the 2nd Rajputs followed in support at two hundred yards distance; and the 47th Sikhs were in third line, echeloned to the right, having special instructions to be on the watch for a Turkish counter-attack.

General Fowler, commanding 37th Brigade, had instructed his infantry to join in the 8th Brigade attack as it came up with them. Half the 1/2nd Gurkhas would be in the firing line, with the remainder of the battalion in support. Half the Somerset Light Infantry were to follow echeloned to the left of the Gurkhas as brigade reserve and the remainder of the Somerset would take up a position in rear of the gap between the 37th and 9th Brigades, in readiness for any Turkish counter-attack from that direction.

Supported by a heavy British artillery bombardment, the advance of the 8th Brigade was carried out rapidly and with great steadiness, meeting with little hostile fire till the troops reached the Dujaila depression. Here, however, they encountered heavy rifle and machine gun fire and fairly heavy artillery fire. Pushing steadily on across the depression, the attackers came under an extensive cross fire from the redoubt, and from trenches to the northward and southward of it, from which they suffered many casualties. The accuracy of burst, direction and intensity of the Turkish artillery fire, which created a barrage on each flank of the brigade across the depression, is said by many of the attackers with experience in France to have been as good as that of the German artillery. At 5.15 p.m. the British supporting artillery fire was turned on to the trenches on either side of the redoubt causing some diminution in the Turkish fire; and then the Manchesters, by a gallant charge under covering fire of the brigade machine guns, entered the redoubt, capturing two lines of trenches where they were joined immediately by parts of the 59th Rifles, 2nd Rajputs and 1/2nd Gurkhas. In the meantime the 47th Sikhs, moving towards their right, took up a position on the west bank of the depression.

The British and Indian infantry in the redoubt then began to bomb their way along the hostile trenches leading outwards, but the setting sun in their eyes combined with the dust and smoke caused by the fighting made it very difficult for them to see ; and, owing to the heavy casualties among the bombers and bomb-carriers, their supply of bombs was soon exhausted. This caused a check ; and the Turks, under cover of an accurate artillery bombardment of the redoubt, pushed in a determined and heavy counter-attack headed by bombers against both flanks.* For a time the British held to what they had won, but their casualties had much reduced their numbers and without bombs they could offer no adequate resistance. Consequently, as it was getting dark the remnants of the attackers were forced to retire, covered by the fire of the 47th Sikhs, who, behaving with great steadiness, drove back two attempts of the enemy to leave their trenches and pursue.

Any attempt to renew the assault was out of the question and under cover of the fire of the 47th the force reformed and withdrew in good order, the men of the 8th Brigade moving back to the eastern side of the depression, and those of the 37th Brigade to the trenches whence they had started to join in the assault. After dark the 8th Brigade retired with their wounded towards the position of the Corps Artillery, meeting on the way a staff officer who had been sent by General Keary to ascertain the situation and who took back word of the failure of the assault.

In response to their orders, the 9th, 28th and 36th Brigades had made in the meantime another gallant attempt to carry the trenches immediately to their front ; but they were now under Turkish gun fire as well as heavy machine gun and rifle fire, the whole of the British artillery supporting fire was concentrated on the redoubt, and they were definitely checked after a further short advance. The front lines of the three brigades were reported to have reached within about 1,200 yards of the redoubt, but it seems quite clear from the different war diaries that they never reached the Turkish trench line about 1,500 yards south of the redoubt.

Hearing that the assault had failed, General Aylmer ordered his whole force to concentrate near the position of the Corps Artillery. This order reached General Kemball at 7.50 p.m. and came to him as a surprise and great disappointment. He had seen the men of the 8th and 37th Brigades swarming

* According to Kiesling it was the 51st Division which made this counter-attack. They had crossed the Tigris at Maqasis.

into the redoubt just before dark and had not heard that they had been driven out again; his own three brigades had, in accordance with his orders, made good the line which they had reached in their final advance; and until he received the order for concentration he had seen no reason for despondency. He ordered the Cavalry Brigade, which had fallen back at dusk to a position near his headquarters, to comply at once with General Aylmer's order; but he felt that it would be very difficult for his infantry to do the same. They were much mixed up and disorganised and had suffered heavy casualties, which were then in process of being collected from the battle-field by the bearer divisions of the field ambulances. Accordingly, at 8.55 p.m., he sent a message to Corps headquarters asking for staff officers to assist him in the movement and saying that he would move the wounded by batches under infantry escort as soon as possible.

In the meantime, General Aylmer had decided to retire next morning to Wadi, unless reconnaissance then showed that the Turks had withdrawn. It appeared to him that all hope of inflicting the severe defeat on the Turks, which he considered necessary to enable him to join hands with the Kut garrison, was gone; and the danger of his force being cut off from their ships appeared to him very great. He also felt that after their exertions of the previous thirty-six hours his troops would not have sufficient strength to make another assault and then, if unsuccessful, retire to Wadi; while the available transport would be quite insufficient to bring away the fresh casualties. Moreover, he did not consider that the chances of a successful assault were at all good, for the Turks were now well prepared to withstand an attack; he did not think that their reserve had yet been in action*; and his own force had lost heavily. Finally, his staff, after careful search, had reported that there was insufficient water on the battlefield for his whole force. In regard to this, it appears that all General Kemball's units except the 1/6th Devonshire got sufficient water from wells dug by General Kemball's sappers in the Dujaila depression†; but the cavalry, the 3rd Division and other parts of the force are shown by the war diaries to have suffered much during the night from shortage of water.

Feeling, therefore, that to renew the assault would probably lead to disaster and thus diminish future chances of a successful

* In this he seems to have been mistaken.

† Water thus obtained, however, frequently became after a short time so brackish as to be unfit for drinking.

relief of Kut, General Aylmer issued orders at 9 p.m. for the whole force to be ready at 5 a.m. next morning to move off at short notice ; and orders for withdrawal to the Tigris were prepared for issue if required.

As it got dark the hostile fire diminished considerably and neither then nor after dark did the Turks make any attempt at a counter-offensive. Slight rifle fire continued during the night, at times increasing to heavy outbursts which in at least one instance seems to have been occasioned by British escorts firing at Arab marauders. In the early part of the night parties of British were engaged in bringing in the wounded and some of these parties suffered a good many casualties from the Turkish fire.* Eventually, all their wounded having been collected, the 28th and 36th Brigades began at about 2.30 a.m. to retire to their previous day's position of deployment, followed by the 9th Brigade at about 4 a.m. There was no interference by the enemy. Eastward of the Dujaila redoubt the British collecting parties had been practically undisturbed by the enemy.

At 5 a.m. on the 9th March staff officers from the various formations attended at Corps headquarters and received orders for a retirement to the Tigris. For this the force was divided into three bodies. On the right or northern flank, the Cavalry Brigade (less two squadrons), the 4th Brigade and 2nd Battery, R.F.A., and the 7th, 35th and 37th Infantry Brigades, all under General Keary, were to cover the withdrawal of the main body and were then to retire eastward, forming a northern flank guard. General Kemball, with the 9th Brigade, R.F.A., 9th and 28th Infantry Brigades and 34th Pioneers would form rearguard ; and General Christian with two squadrons of cavalry, the 8th Battery, R.F.A., and the 36th Infantry Brigade was at first to guard the southern flank and then to join the rear of the main body, which would start the retirement at 6 a.m. Owing to the difficulty of collecting the wounded, however, this hour of starting for the main body had subsequently to be postponed.

At 6.30 a.m. General Kemball reported a steady enemy movement from Imam al Mansur to the Hai bridge, but he could not distinguish whether their columns consisted of troops or transport. At 7.25 a.m. he sent a " clear line " message to Corps headquarters saying that the enemy's camps

* Among those collecting the wounded was the Rev. R. Irwin, Chaplain to the Forces, whose work on that and many other similar occasions is mentioned as being particularly gallant.

had all disappeared and that he could observe no movement of enemy troops; Turkish artillery had fired about ten shells at long range from the vicinity of Imam al Mansur about 7 a.m., but had since shown no signs of activity; parties of marauding Arabs were searching the battlefield,* and General Kemball believed that the Turks had all retired. He suggested that an aerial reconnaissance should be carried out, and he asked whether in the meantime he should continue his movements in retirement. His three brigades were in position near the southern corner of the depression, in which all his wounded had been collected and were being placed in carts; and he was gradually sending his transport off and would carry on the retirement if he received no further orders. He added that the firing by his guns and infantry was directed entirely against Arab marauders at long range and was putting them to flight; and he was prepared to hold on to his position all day without support.

At 8.20 a.m. a hostile aeroplane passed overhead and at 8.55, when the 36th Brigade had just commenced to retire north-eastward, General Kemball received instructions that the 9th and 28th Brigades were for the present to remain where they were, as an aerial reconnaissance was in progress and further orders would be issued on receipt of its report.

About 6.15 a.m. the Corps artillery opened fire on the Sinn Abtar and Dujaila redoubts, and were replied to by enemy guns in the vicinity of the former, and between 8.30 and 9 a.m. General Aylmer received the reports of aeroplane reconnaissances carried out between 7.45 and 8.30. No troops could be seen at the Bait Isa-Chahela positions. Boats were in use at the Maqasis ferry, but no formed bodies of troops had been seen in the vicinity. A few men were moving south-eastward along the Maqasis canal, westward of which was a camp of fifty tents and a body of 1,500 troops halted. Further to the west, in the Dujaila depression, was a camp of twelve tents from which small parties were moving eastward. Carts and transport were moving in both directions between the Es Sinn position and the Hai, where the camps near the bridge were still standing and where 600 men were seen along the banks south-eastward of the bridge. Near an entrenchment some four miles south-west of the Dujaila redoubt were six halted groups of troops with transport; and guns were in position south of the Sinn Abtar redoubt facing south-east down the Dujaila depression, with two new gun pits close up.

* General Kemball took this to imply the absence of Turkish troops from the battlefield.

As this report appeared to General Aylmer to show that the Turks had not withdrawn, he decided to retire ; and at 10.45 a.m. General Kemball received instructions that the main body would start at 10.15. He was much disappointed, as he was personally convinced that the enemy had evacuated most of their trenches during the night and were preparing to retire from the position. Next day he received apparent confirmation of this view from Major Leachman of the Political Department who had heard from Arabs that the Turks, having retired from their trenches during the night, had moved back towards their bridgehead and ferry in expectation of a further attack. The German accounts of Gleich and Kiesling throw no light on the point ; but the Turkish General Staff say that they were not only not preparing to retire, but were arranging for a counter-attack ; and they comment on the passive attitude adopted during the action by General Townshend.

We will now turn to the action, during these operations, of General Townshend's troops in Kut and of the force under General Younghusband in front of the Hanna position.

In his book General Townshend says that on the night 4th/5th March three of his Arab boatmen deserted and evidently informed the enemy of the rafts and flying bridges being prepared ; as, on the morning of the 5th, the Turks could be seen reinforcing their trenches on the right bank of the Tigris to oppose any attempt at crossing.

As mentioned before, it appeared probable to General Townshend that when the Turks saw General Aylmer's advance they would attack Kut to prevent the garrison co-operating with General Aylmer. General Townshend accordingly detailed small forces under Generals Delamain and Hoghton to hold his north-western and north-eastern fronts, while he kept two infantry brigades (30th under General Melliss and a provisional brigade under Colonel Evans composed of Norfolks, Oxfords, 22nd Punjabis and 48th Pioneers) at a central position south-east of the town in readiness either to reinforce his northern fronts or to cross the river. He also concentrated guns to fire to the south-east and east, with the heavier guns arranged for action towards the Hai bridge and the enemy camps near Es Sinn, though he feared that both these localities were well out of range.

General Townshend says that from 5.30 a.m. on the 8th March he held the force intended for co-operation in constant readiness. The first sound of gunfire in the direction of Es Sinn was heard at 7.10 a.m., but beyond flocks of sheep and

transport moving towards the Hai the Kut garrison could see nothing; and by 11 a.m. the mirage rendered observation towards Es Sinn impossible, though the Hai bridge was still visible.

At 12.10 p.m. General Townshend received a message from General Aylmer saying that the enemy were sending their reserve from Maqasis towards the Dujaila redoubt, where a stubborn resistance was being made. In addition to other news, General Aylmer said that his aeroplanes reported that the enemy's reserves from Shumran were moving towards the Hai, and he asked General Townshend what news he had and what steps he was taking to co-operate. General Townshend replied that he would begin to send troops across when he saw General Aylmer's turning attack developing south of Dujaila, and he asked where this turning attack then was and what was its progress. General Townshend also said that he was watching Shumran carefully and that no reserves had left there except about three squadrons of cavalry which had gone to the Hai and 200 infantry which had gone eastward along the left bank of the Tigris.

Nothing more of importance occurred at Kut during the day, and next morning General Townshend learnt that the attack had failed.

The main rôle of General Younghusband's force, whose strength was about 100 sabres, 5,000 rifles and 22 guns, was to give the enemy the impression that an assault was to be delivered against the Hanna position. As mentioned before, the 19th and 21st Brigades had pushed their trenches to within three hundred yards of the enemy's line, and this was bombarded by the British artillery twice during the night 6th/7th and four times during daylight on the 7th March. Before sunset on the 7th a small column with a good deal of transport moved northward from the Wadi camp to give the impression to the enemy that it was the advanced guard of a larger force moving against the Turkish northern flank; but it only marched till darkness fell and then returned to camp. During the night General Younghusband's guns carried out several bombardments; his machine guns opened fire at intervals; and at 1.30 a.m. the British fired three rockets as for a signal to assault. By this time the Turkish garrison of the position were well on the alert, and when the rockets fired they at once opened a heavy and rapid rifle fire; and they appear to have expected an attack, for just before dawn they replied to the British artillery bombardment with heavy rifle fire.

During the 8th March the artillery and naval gunboats* again bombarded the Turkish position, and after dark General Younghusband's force again took action to make the Turks believe that their position was about to be assaulted. Soon after midnight on the 8th/9th General Younghusband heard that the attack on the Dujaila redoubt had failed, and a little later he received orders to make certain that the Hanna position had not been vacated as the enemy had transferred a number of men from the left to the right bank of the Tigris. General Aylmer had received a report from his air force at midday on the 8th that a stream of men was moving westward along the left bank of the Tigris to Sannaiyat, and, from this and other reported movements in the vicinity, he thought that the Hanna position might have been vacated. General Younghusband was also directed to send a battalion to secure the Senna canal on the right bank of the Tigris so as to assist General Aylmer's withdrawal. At 5.15 a.m. on the 9th the Turkish reply to the fire of his own first line satisfied General Younghusband that the enemy were still holding the Hanna position in strength ; and at 6 a.m. he sent the 107th Pioneers and a company of the 6th King's Own Royal Regiment† to occupy the Senna canal.

To return to the retirement of the force on the right bank. About 10 a.m. Turkish guns, apparently in position between their two main redoubts, opened fire on General Kemball's troops, causing a few casualties among his batteries ; but they soon seemed to lose sight of their target, probably owing to the mirage, as their shells began to go astray and then ceased. The retirement of General Kemball's troops began at 11.50 a.m. and continued unmolested till 1.30 p.m., when the Turks following him up opened a somewhat ineffective rifle and shell fire, but were soon shaken off by General Kemball's artillery. During this period of the retirement British aeroplanes reported no sign of any hostile advance from their position north of the Dujaila redoubt, though a force of about 1,500 cavalry with guns and some infantry were seen moving towards the position vacated by General Kemball's force.

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* *Mantis*, *Mayfly* and *Sandfly*. *Gadfly* and *Dragonfly* kept below the bridge to protect the north-eastern flank and approaches to the camp. *Mantis*. the first of the new large "China" class gunboats to arrive, reached the front on 5th March ; of 645 tons displacement, drawing 4 to 5 feet of water and with a speed of 14 knots, her armament consisted of two 6-inch and two 12-pounder guns.

† This company, the leading unit of the 13th Division from Egypt, reached the front on the 8th March.

On the northern flank General Keary commenced his retirement about 11.30 a.m., and was unmolested till 4.15 p.m., when six hostile pursuing guns, which in the mirage had at first been taken for part of General Kemball's rear guard, opened fire, but were soon driven back by General Keary's artillery.

At 3.20 p.m. General Aylmer issued orders for the whole force, except six battalions and two guns which were to hold the line of the Senna canal, to move to the Wadi camp. The withdrawal continued in very good order, but proved very trying to the troops suffering from thirst and exhaustion; and the last of the rear guard did not reach camp till after midnight.

At 2.30 a.m. on the 10th March General Aylmer sent off a telegram to General Lake reporting the arrival at Wadi and giving his reasons for the retirement—these have already been stated. General Aylmer went on to say that there was no reason why the attempt to relieve Kut should not be renewed at an early date when reinforcements had arrived, as the *moral* of his men was very satisfactory.

The British casualties on the 8th and 9th March amounted to a total of 3,474,* most of them having occurred on the 8th. A considerable portion of the infantry, 7th and 35th Brigades, Oxfords, 92nd Punjabis and 34th Pioneers, not having been seriously engaged, had but few casualties. The 9th Infantry Brigade had lost 23 per cent. of their strength, three battalions of the 28th Brigade from 24 to 32 per cent., the 36th Brigade 24 per cent. and the 8th Brigade, in which the losses of the Manchesters and 2nd Rajputs had been especially heavy, 33 per cent.

According to Kiesling, the Turkish casualties amounted to 26 officers and 1,259 other ranks. The Turks do not appear to have pressed the pursuit with much vigour; and their main effort seems to have been an advance by their 35th Division, which on the afternoon of the 9th advanced and occupied the position on the right bank about the Abu Rumman mounds which had been held by General Keary's troops before the battle.

Thanks mainly to the increased medical establishment with the force and to the better weather, the arrangements for the evacuation of wounded were much better and more successful than had previously been the case. The fighting had, for the most part, taken place about seventeen miles from Wadi camp, and owing to the failure of the assault the pre-arranged plans

* See Appendix XXV.

for the collection of casualties had to be altered on the evening of the 8th. As it was, however, before dark they all reached Wadi, where, after some unavoidable delay in crossing the river, they were accommodated in field ambulances and clearing hospitals. From Wadi the evacuation to the base was carried out in ordinary river steamers in which the wounded arrived at Basra in good condition. The wounded, however, endured in many cases great suffering from the jolting of the transport carts in the retirement by land ; but this could not be helped, as at that time there were very few proper ambulance wagons in the country.

Thus ended an operation which at certain stages seemed to promise more chances of success than the previous attempt to relieve Kut ; and its conduct has probably given rise to more comment and criticism than any other action in the campaign.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE THIRD ATTEMPT TO RELIEVE KUT; THE SUCCESSFUL ADVANCE TO, AND FIRST AND SECOND ATTACKS ON, SANNAIYAT.

(SEE MAP 19.)

AFTER the failure and abandonment of the attempt to turn the Turkish right at Dujaila the British situation on the Tigris assumed a more critical aspect, owing mainly to the imminent arrival of the annual floods in the Tigris caused by the melting snows. These floods would not only limit the avenues of attack open to the British and hamper all their military movements, but they would make trench warfare, which since the failure to carry the Hanna position had become the normal state, increasingly difficult; and, although the Turks would also have to reckon with the floods, experience showed that these would be likely to embarrass the defenders to a far smaller extent than they would the assailants. Moreover, being upstream, the Turks could to a large extent so utilise the floods as to limit and hamper the operations of the British and thus assist materially their own defence.

The *moral* of officers and men remained excellent, but they felt keenly the continued lack of success; and, though their fine discipline prevented the open expression of their views, there is evidence to show that there was a considerable feeling among officers and men that the gallantry of the force had been greatly handicapped. Though there were some doubts, as there must always be in unsuccessful operations, regarding the tactical ability and direction of their commanders, what were more generally resented were the absence or inadequacy of up-to-date military armament and equipment, the shortage of all transport, the limited scale and variety of rations, the lack of what are often termed "comforts" and the still imperfect medical arrangements. Nevertheless, the evidence of non-combatants present at this time is a striking tribute to the spirit which animated the whole of the fighting force in their monotonous and uncomfortable existence. It must be remembered that in Mesopotamia there was little relaxation for officers and men during their short periods of rest from trench warfare—no comparatively pleasant billets to fall back to, few amusements, no regular periods of short leave at home or in civilised parts, and often increased discomfort if they fell ill or were wounded.

Officers and men in Mesopotamia attributed to the parsimony of the Government of India much of the inadequate arrangements and the shortage in equipment from which they were suffering, and they remarked that the Finance Member of the Council of the Governor-General in India, in introducing his financial statement for 1915–16, had observed that the chief economy in the Budget proposals for the year occurred under the military services. In point of fact, whatever limits the Government of India may have placed on their military expenditure before the war, the Mesopotamia Commission, who investigated the allegations against the Government of India and had their own criticisms to record, admitted that no evidence had been produced before them to show that any urgent demand put forward by the military authorities had been definitely refused by the Finance Department. Moreover, the Government of India did not bear the cost of any abnormal war expenditure, as India was precluded by law from doing so without the consent of both the British Houses of Parliament; and in the autumn of 1914 resolutions of both these Houses had specifically restricted her war expenditure to the charges which would ordinarily have fallen on her if the troops employed overseas from India had remained in that country. Consequently, abnormal war expenditure on account of the operations in Mesopotamia was borne by the Imperial Government.*

During February 1916 public opinion in the United Kingdom had been much exercised at the reports of the sufferings of the wounded in Mesopotamia owing to the inadequate medical arrangements there. Mr. Chamberlain, who took a great interest in the matter, had already written on several occasions concerning these reports to Lord Hardinge, who in the ordinary course had referred the question to the Commander-in-Chief in India. Sir Beauchamp Duff, who had seen nothing in the reports he himself had received from Mesopotamia to show that there was anything seriously amiss, and knowing from experience that in unsuccessful operations carried out under difficult conditions hardships must occur and that complaints were often unduly exaggerated, appears at first rather to have minimised the importance of the reports quoted by Mr. Chamberlain. But on making further enquiries he came to the conclusion that the reports might have a real foundation of

* Subsequently both Houses of Parliament allowed the Government of India, at her own request, to pay a contribution amounting to over £100,000,000 towards the abnormal expenses of the war.

truth, and, as stated in Chapter XIX, he sent a senior medical officer to Mesopotamia to enquire into the matter. This officer's report did not satisfy either Lord Hardinge or the Commander-in-Chief, and they both agreed to send a Commission to Mesopotamia to make a full enquiry. Sir William Vincent, a high Indian civil official, and Major-General A. H. Bingley, two of the members of this Commission, began their duties early in March and were subsequently joined at Basra by the third member, Mr. E. A. Ridsdale, a Red Cross Commissioner. Their report, published by the Mesopotamia Commission as an appendix to their own report, shows that their appointment was fully justified.*

The failure of the Dujaila attack and the consequently decreased chances of effecting the relief of Kut caused considerable apprehension in India and London. There was no time to send further assistance in men, armament and equipment, and all thoughts were bent on how best to add to the chances of success. It was known that General Aylmer had experienced great difficulties ;† but he appeared to have been unfortunate and had failed. There were also doubts whether his health would continue to stand the great strain to which he would be subjected ; and it was felt that the crisis did not admit of too careful a consideration of individual interests. It was consequently decided to give another general a chance of showing whether he could obtain better results ; and General Gorringe, who had done so well in the operations in Arabistan and near Nasiriya, was selected to take over the command of the Tigris Corps. The difficulties, due to no fault of his own, under which General Aylmer had laboured have been related, and it must be left to others to form an opinion of his direction of the operations. But in all the circumstances of the case, our sympathies must go with the soldier, whose past service had been so fine and gallant, deprived of his command at such a critical juncture.

On the 9th March, after the retirement from Dujaila, the 7th Infantry Brigade had, under orders from General Aylmer, taken up a position along the line of the Senna canal, with two other battalions (36th Sikhs and 92nd Punjabis) and two field guns on their left, posted at "Twin Canals"; thus closing the space between the Tigris and the Umm al Baram.

* Some of the conclusions of the Vincent-Bingley Commission may be open to question, mainly because, owing to their instructions, they carried out no regular enquiry at Army Headquarters in India.

† It seems clear that, at this time, the nature and extent of these difficulties were not thoroughly realised in London or in India.

Next morning the force at Twin Canals reported a hostile column of cavalry and infantry to the southward; but they advanced no nearer, so presumably were only bent on reconnaissance.

This Turkish movement, however, confirmed General Keary, the 3rd Division commander, in the opinion he had already formed that it was advisable to re-occupy the Abu Rumman mounds and the line of Thorny Nala at once. Otherwise, the Turks might do so, closing the other end of the space between the Tigris and the Umm al Baram by entrenchments and thus obtain a position whence they could let loose flood water from the Tigris on the British trenches and camp. General Keary accordingly sent off a staff officer to explain his views to Corps headquarters, with the result that he obtained permission to occupy the line of Thorny Nala and Mason's Mounds, but was told that for the time being he was not to go as far as Abu Rumman.

The force remaining on the right bank of the Tigris consisted of the Cavalry Brigade, the Corps Artillery and the 3rd Division, to which the 37th Infantry Brigade was now attached.

Reconnaissance during the afternoon of the 10th March indicated that some 300 Turkish infantry were holding Abu Rumman with an advanced detachment at Mason's Mounds; and later some Turkish cavalry with guns worked round southward of the Umm al Baram, but after firing a few shells at the British camp at Ora withdrew again before dark. In the evening General Keary issued orders for the occupation next morning of Thorny Nala by a detachment under General Egerton. The 92nd Punjabis from Twin Canals were to occupy Thorny Nala for a mile northward of the Pools of Siloam by 5.30 a.m., while General Egerton, leaving two of his battalions to hold the Senna canal, was to occupy the line on the right of the 92nd Punjabis with the remainder of his 7th Brigade and a field battery. The 9th Brigade, with a field battery, were to move in support towards the Senna canal.

Moving out westward at about 5 a.m. on the 11th March, General Egerton with the 1/Connaught Rangers and 89th Punjabis at first encountered some slight opposition; and the Connaughts, pressing forward, overran in the dark the shallow Thorny Nala and found themselves confronted by the Turkish trenches south-east of the Abu Rumman Mounds. Both sides were surprised, but the Connaughts, seizing the opportunity, charged home and captured the trenches and some fifty prisoners. As it got light, however, they found

that in pushing forward they had lost touch with the 89th Punjabis and had thus uncovered their own right flank. Moreover, General Egerton, following the Connaughts, decided that his orders not to advance as far as Abu Rumman precluded his attempting either to remain where he was or to capture the whole position; and he withdrew the bulk of the battalion to Thorny Nala, leaving a detachment to hold the south-eastern portion of the captured Turkish trenches as an advanced post. The two leading companies of the 89th had, meanwhile, also pushed on across Thorny Nala, capturing the northern end of the Turkish front line trench at Abu Rumman; but were then checked by the Turkish second line. A fierce fire-fight ensued, but the Punjabis ammunition ran short, their messages for reinforcements miscarried and the enemy began to counter-attack against both flanks. In consequence, the two companies, having lost about 75 per cent. of their strength, were forced to withdraw to Thorny Nala. While these operations had been in progress on the right, the 92nd Punjabis had occupied their position in Thorny Nala on the left without difficulty.

General Keary, on hearing of the successful advances towards Abu Rumman, at once sent forward reinforcements with orders to capture the position. But it was too late. Heavy rain had begun to fall, which rendered movement so difficult that the project was abandoned for the time being. In this short but gallant affair the British sustained some 300 casualties.*

On the 9th March General Lake had asked General Aylmer for his proposals for future action to relieve Kut, and said that, unless the situation developed to our advantage or an earlier effort was imperative, the next advance should not be made till the three infantry brigades, and if possible one of the artillery brigades, of the 13th Division had reached the front. More river craft were arriving at Basra and General Lake hoped to be able to send up these troops in sufficient time for the next effort. He confirmed this opinion in a further telegram sent on the 11th, in which he forecasted that the three infantry brigades (38th, 39th and 40th), one artillery brigade and the 8th Welch Regiment (Pioneers), all of the 13th Division, would reach the front by the 20th.

On the 11th March General Gorringe took over command from General Aylmer and reported to General Lake that his policy was to extend systematically along the Tigris right

* 1/Connaught Rangers, 85; 89th Punjabis, 220.

bank, consolidating as he went forward and placing artillery in good positions to dominate hostile guns on the left bank.

On this day, the general position of General Gorringe's force was as follows. On the right bank of the Tigris the advanced line, Thorny Nala–Twin Canals, was held by the 7th Brigade, two battalions 37th Brigade and eight guns; behind them the 9th Brigade with 14 guns were holding the line of the Senna canal; and in camp near the boat bridge were the 8th Brigade, the remainder of the 37th Brigade, the 34th Pioneers, 20th and 21st Sapper Companies, the Cavalry Brigade and 32 guns. On the left bank the 7th Division held the trenches in front of the Hanna position; the 19th and 21st Brigades occupying the forward trenches supported by 28 guns, with the 28th Brigade, 107th Pioneers and 3rd and 13th Sapper Companies in reserve. At the Wadi Camp were the 16th Cavalry, 35th and 36th Infantry Brigades, one company 12th Pioneers, 12th Sapper Company and six guns.

The headquarters of the 38th Infantry Brigade with the 6th King's Own Royal Regiment had arrived at Shaikh Saad, where the remainder of the 13th Division were now beginning to concentrate.

In a telegram to the Commander-in-Chief in India on the 11th March the Chief of the Imperial General staff referred to the great change to our advantage which the successful relief of Kut would bring about not only in the situation in the East but also, owing to the troops that it would release from Egypt for the main theatre, in all other theatres of war; and while he had, he said, but vague and scanty information of the local conditions and factors in Mesopotamia, he felt impelled to invite attention to certain points. The enemy's fighting value, he continued, was lower than ours and he must be embarrassed both by the Russian operations and by great difficulties in keeping himself supplied, especially with ammunition. Experience on all fronts had shown that, given adequate artillery bombardment, trenches could be taken. Consequently every effort should be made to accumulate at the front a lavish stock of artillery ammunition, especially high-explosive and howitzer. The telegram then went on to say that in Mesopotamia we had certainly attacked two, or even three, times just before additional reinforcements could arrive and it was understood that even at that date howitzer batteries were at Basra (i.e., implying that they should have been sent up to the front). In conclusion, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff questioned the advisability of General

Lake establishing his headquarters at Basra instead of at the front,* and he advised a careful watch for assistance from the Russian Khaniqin advance.

Sir Beauchamp Duff repeated all but the last part of this telegram to General Lake, who replied that no effort was being spared to effect the relief.

It seemed to him that the Chief of the Imperial General Staff rather underestimated the comparative fighting value of the enemy, whose force now consisted for the most part of European and Anatolian Turks of the highest quality and immeasurably superior to the Arabs who had opposed us in the earlier stages of the campaign; they had shown themselves capable of prompt and formidable counter-attacks; and they were well supplied with machine guns and small arm ammunition.† On the other hand the quality of our own troops, especially the Indians, had deteriorated owing to the losses among trained officers and men and the lower standard of training of those who had replaced them. Though the Russian success in the Caucasus ‡ had no doubt diverted Turkish reinforcements from Mesopotamia, the small Russian Kermanshah column seemed unlikely to relieve the enemy pressure on the Tigris front. We had certainly a superiority over the Turks in the supply of artillery ammunition and our stock at the front was well maintained, though General Lake had not got as much high-explosive ammunition as he wanted. With regard to the remark that attacks had been carried out without waiting for reinforcements, General Lake asked Sir Beauchamp Duff to repeat to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff a telegram he had sent the previous day. In this General Lake had

* In point of fact, General Lake had already arranged to proceed himself to the front. Coming to the conclusion, soon after his first arrival, that it was of vital importance to the existence of the force at the front, in its race against time, that the improvement of the base should be carried out with the least possible delay, he found in practice that, to ensure this, his own presence was imperative. The main factors contributing to this unsatisfactory state of affairs at Basra and the steps taken to rectify matters have already been mentioned; but General Lake found that the different elements and interests engaged in the improvement work—many of them under the dual control of himself and the authorities in India—were, owing especially to the lack of labour and river transport, very liable to clash, to the great detriment of the work in hand. Generally in these cases, and also in many political and financial questions, he found that requirements could only be satisfied by his personal authority.

† Captain The Hon. Aubrey Herbert, M.P., told the Mesopotamia Commission that from his experience of both campaigns he considered that the Turkish troops in Mesopotamia were at this period a better fighting force than those which had fought us in the Gallipoli peninsula.

‡ The Russians had taken Bitlis on the 2nd March and on the 4th they had landed at Atna to attack Trebizond.

pointed out that the General Staff at the War Office did not seem to realise fully the paralysing effect on his operations that his shortage of river transport had exercised. At the time of the first attack on Hanna on the 21st January, there had been, he said, in the country 10,000 infantry and 12 guns available as reinforcements which could not for this reason be sent up to the front in time; and similarly some 12,000 infantry, 26 guns, 2,000 mules and a large number of carts could not reach the front in time for the attack on Dujaila on the 8th March. The promised additional river craft had not, he continued, arrived at the times anticipated and it was quite uncertain when any of them would reach Basra, although recently there had been an improvement in this respect; repair work to existing craft was being carried on day and night even at the risk of a break-down among the personnel employed; but the available vessels still fell far short of requirements, and, although General Lake hoped to be in a position to transport his main requirements during the flood season if the improved rate of arrival of craft continued, he could not hope to be able to utilise all his available force for the relief operations before the floods commenced; and he explained that he found it impossible to lay down beforehand any useful provisional programme of movement. Further, the rain had rendered the land route impassable for nearly a month past, and, though passable at the time he telegraphed, it was not yet fully bridged.

It seems advisable to enter here more fully into some of General Lake's difficulties in the above respects. Adequate artillery bombardment of the Turkish positions was not very easy having regard to the nature of the guns at General Lake's disposal, which at this period consisted of the following:—

Guns.		*Ammunition.*		
Number. *Nature.*	*Shrapnel.*	*High-explosive or Lyddite.*	*Total.*
24 .. 10-pounder.	25,000	2,800	27,800
4 .. 13-pounder.	10,800	2,000	12,800
20 .. 15-pounder.	Not known.		12,800
102 .. 18-pounder.	105,800	19,200	125,000
8 .. 60-pounder.	1,000	1,000*	2,000
2 .. 4-inch.	1,800	1,100	2,900
12 .. 4·5-inch howitzers.	5,600	6,400	12,000
24 .. 5-inch howitzers.	4,000	18,800	22,800

* A further 1,000 rounds shrapnel and 1,000 of high-explosive reached Basra on 22nd March.

In addition, the naval authorities had lent him a 6-inch howitzer of old pattern and limited range, but without range-tables. The 60-pounders had only just reached the country and had not yet been in action, and, although their advent meant a great improvement in artillery power, they were not suitable for bombardment of entrenchments, as they had a low trajectory and high velocity. The War Office had been unable to supply heavy howitzers, and those of 4·5 and 5-inch were deficient in power and range—while the 5-inch were lacking in accuracy also—and consequently not fit to cope effectually with trenches. The proportion of high-explosive ammunition was not considered sufficient by General Lake for adequate artillery bombardment, and Egypt, which was his source of supply, could not furnish his full requirements. The trench mortars asked for in February had not yet arrived; and many of his battalions had still only two machine guns each.

On the 11th March the total number of available river steamers and tugs was 37, which with 68 available barges gave an average daily delivery at the front of only 300 tons against a requirement of 468 tons,* without allowing for conveyance of troops personnel and on the assumption that the full number of craft was always available, which, of course, was not the case. In addition, some 200 *mahailas* had been taken up locally to supplement the steamers, but they were a tedious and uncertain means of transport; and many of them had to be employed as second line transport at the front. By the 25th March the number of steamers and tugs had risen to 45 and the barges to 79, but this gave only an additional daily average tonnage of 38 tons, while the daily requirements had also risen by 22 tons. By this time many more steam-craft were being requisitioned or built for Mesopotamia, but most of them were not likely to arrive for many months. †

Although much had been done to relieve the congestion in the port at Basra, there was a continuous line of vessels some miles in length waiting to be discharged; and owing mainly to the inadequate number of tugs and lighters and

* Supply 400, Ordnance 21, Engineer 34, Medical 4, Miscellaneous 9=468. While supply remained generally constant, the other figures necessarily varied.

† The steamers sent out were often of different types, requiring special spare parts and fittings and also barges suited to their type and power; and steamers frequently arrived which required extensive overhauling, for which spare parts and fittings were often lacking. To have made the most of the existing steamers, six barges (two with steamer, two loading and two unloading) would have been necessary for each steamer, but owing to some misunderstanding nothing like this number were sent out.

the shortage of labour it was found impossible to accelerate discharge as much as was desired. In March the first two porter corps from India and a labour corps from Egypt reached Basra, but further corps could apparently not be arranged for ; and the Arab coolies were most uncertain, declining to work at all in wet weather. The workshops and dockyard facilities were limited and were always working under great strain, as the steamers could not be spared for proper periodic overhaul and were constantly in need of repair to prevent complete break-down.

In fact, neither the base nor its facilities were adequate to support the traffic ; and the necessary arrangements for its proper extension had not been made in sufficient time. Some of the reasons for this will be apparent from the past narrative, but it is impossible on the evidence available to arrive at any definite conclusions as to the responsibility for the omission. The Mesopotamia Commission took a great deal of evidence on the subject and arrived at certain conclusions, but, as the Attorney-General said in the House of Commons debate on their report, it has yet to be ascertained and proved that these conclusions were well founded.*

On the 9th March General Townshend telegraphed that he was killing off 1,100 animals and that by this means and by reducing the British bread and the Indian grain ration he could make his stock of barley last till roughly the 7th April, before which date he ought to be relieved. He would still have 1,300 animals left, of which about 900 would be required for meat up to the 7th April, but those remaining alive on that date would be quite incapable of work.

On the 10th March Halil Pasha wrote to General Townshend recapitulating General Aylmer's failures to carry the Turkish positions, and saying that he saw no likelihood of General Townshend being relieved. He added that according to deserters the Kut garrison were short of food and were suffering from disease ; and Halil suggested surrender to the Turkish forces, which were, he said, growing larger and larger. General Townshend replied that he saw much chance of relief, and would not consider the question of surrender ; and he reported the correspondence to Generals Aylmer and Lake.

General Townshend, in his book, says that the effect of the repulse at Dujaila was soon apparent among his troops ; that there was a general feeling of gloom and depression ;

* "Hansard," 12th July 1917.

that desertion among the Indian troops increased; and that the Arabs of the town looked upon the British cause as lost. In a telegram of the 11th to General Aylmer, however, he spoke in high terms of the conduct of his British troops, whose discipline, patience and cheeriness were, he said, splendid. He could not say the same, however, of his Mahomedan and some of his Hindu troops.

General Townshend himself recognised, he says, that there was little hope of relief and he considered it certain that the relieving force would never again find such favourable conditions as had offered in the Dujaila attack. The Tigris flood was expected on the 16th March, and it might stop all relief operations. If he was not relieved by the 7th April, breaking out of Kut would be rendered impossible by the floods, and famine would compel him to surrender. Accordingly he asked Generals Gorringe and Lake on the 11th March whether they did not think it would be advantageous, while preparations for the next effort at relief were in progress, for him to enter into negotiations with Halil. His idea was that, as there was no longer any likelihood of the Turks being able to retake the Basra *vilayet*, the further retention of Kut was not necessary, and he might be able to obtain honourable terms from Halil by exchanging Kut for permission to his own force to march out with their arms, artillery, and pouch ammunition and join the relieving force, while their sick and wounded, with the baggage, went down by river. General Townshend said that he had roughly one month's food on starvation diet which might last him, he thought, till the 17th April, but that his staff were going into the matter. If, therefore, there was any doubt in the minds of Generals Gorringe or Lake regarding the certainty of early relief, General Townshend suggested that his proposal should be put before Government. Negotiations to be successful, he said, should be begun soon, while he had food to bargain with, and he pointed out that a third effort at relief would undoubtedly entail heavy losses in addition to those already suffered.

General Gorringe informed General Lake next day that he was making no reply to the above, as he considered that the matter was one solely for General Lake to deal with; but he considered that the fact of Halil wanting to offer terms indicated his desire to free his troops for other operations, and in a month's time much might happen in our favour. General Lake told General Townshend on the 13th March that, though he did not approve of his suggestions, they had been forwarded

to India and London. It did not appear, said General Lake, that even taking the most gloomy view of the prospects of relief any advantage would be gained by entering into negotiations at that date. Any terms offered by Halil, while preparations for relief were proceeding, would inevitably be cancelled should the next attempt be unsuccessful. Moreover, the mere fact of asking for terms would be productive of ill effects, while Halil's proposal to offer terms indicated a desire on his part to free his force for operations elsewhere. This reply of General Lake's received the approval of the authorities in India and London.

After General Gorringe's assumption of command, considerable discussion took place not only between him and General Lake, but also between Mesopotamia, India and London, in regard to the plan of operation for the next attempt at relief. General Lake ascertained that General Gorringe considered it impossible to get behind the Turkish Hanna position by crossing the Tigris in pontoons transported overland along the right bank, owing to the existence of Turkish trenches to oppose any such crossing; and also that he considered any further extension eastwards of the Turkish positions on the right bank would be advantageous to us as exposing the Turks to greater chances of defeat in detail. General Lake also at this period asked the Senior Naval Officer if it would be practicable to assist the garrison of Kut by sending a powerful tug protected with steel plating and with a barge on each side of it loaded with supplies to run the gauntlet at night. The Senior Naval Officer, however, did not consider the idea practicable, as, even if suitable material were available, such craft would not only be very difficult to navigate against the current, but their progress would be so slow as to render them an easy target for the enemy.

On the 15th March, in accordance with a request from Sir Beauchamp Duff, General Lake asked Generals Gorringe and Townshend for their views on the situation for the information of the authorities in India and London.

General Townshend estimated that the Turkish force on the Tigris might amount to 30,000 combatants, of whom 14,000 with 27 guns on the left bank and 7,000 or 8,000 with 19 guns on the right bank, with only the raft ferry at Maqasis to maintain communication between them, interposed between him and General Gorringe's forces. He had been led to believe that three more Turkish divisions might be coming to reinforce their Tigris force, but it seemed possible that part or all of

them might have been diverted to oppose the Russian Kermanshah column. Assuming that General Gorringe had an effective fighting strength of 28,000 with 70 or 80 guns, General Townshend considered that the Turkish main force on the left bank should be our principal objective. He suggested that General Gorringe should make a feint at dusk with a column on the right bank to induce the enemy to transfer forces to that bank, withdrawing this column to the left bank after dark and then by a wide turning movement of his main force to the northward during the night deliver an attack against the enemy's left flank and rear, i.e., a manœuvre similar to that executed by him at the battle of Kut in September, 1915. General Lake, in forwarding this appreciation, pointed out that General Townshend was evidently unaware of the extent of the floods and marshes, which rendered his suggestion impossible in practice.

General Gorringe estimated the total Turkish fighting strength on the Tigris at 25,000 with 75 guns, of whom 9,100 with 24 guns were holding the left bank positions from Hanna to Es Sinn, and 12,000 with 27 guns were holding the right bank positions at Es Sinn and to the eastward. He considered it improbable that the enemy would receive further reinforcement, and reports had been received that a division intended for Mesopotamia had been diverted to Erzerum. He understood that General Townshend's time limit of food was the 17th April; and he considered it reasonable to expect that the 10,000 Russians at Karind,* opposed by 7,000 Turks, with only 5,000 recruits at Baghdad to support them, would in a month's time have reached within striking distance of Baghdad. He took the view that the approaching floods would oblige the Turks to transfer their line of supply to the right bank of the Tigris, and this bank would also, owing to its probable greater immunity from flood inundation, be more suitable for the operations of his own force. He, therefore, came to the conclusion that his best course would be to turn the enemy's right flank, cross the Hai and then force his way to Shumran to capture the enemy's bridge and supplies, as a preliminary to joining hands with General Townshend and to further operations, which would oblige the Turks to attack him or evacuate their positions. This course would also have the advantage that should he not be successful he would in any case hold the line of the Hai and thus prevent the Turks from drawing supplies from the Hai districts.

* They occupied Karind (Western Persia) on the 12th March.

General Gorringe calculated that, when wheeled transport coming with the 13th Division had reached the front, he should be able to reach the Hai with at least 30,000 rifles, 100 guns, ten days' supplies and sufficient ammunition. He proposed in the meantime to continue demonstrations along both banks of the Tigris and to let the enemy expend their energy in entrenching there, while making his own preparations for the advance to the Hai.

In forwarding General Gorringe's appreciation to India and London, General Lake said that he was just starting up the river to go to the front and would prefer not to forward his comments until he had discussed various questions of transport, supply, water and flood conditions with General Gorringe.

The flood conditions on which General Gorringe's plan was greatly dependent require special mention. All information went to show that heavy rain during the latter half of March and in April was most improbable and that the effect of the melting snows constituted the real problem. Usually the Tigris reached its high flood level about the end of March and continued in flood through April and May, rising every twelve or fifteen days, though falling somewhat between each rise. Many of the head streams which brought down the snow-water had their source in Kurdistan between Lakes Van and Urmia, where the presence of the Russian forces allowed our representative with them to telegraph periodical weather reports; and these enabled General Gorringe to calculate approximately when each rise would reach his neighbourhood. He was thus able to make out a chart from which he hoped to arrange to make his attacks after a fall in the river commenced. Reports which both he and General Townshend obtained locally forecasted a lower flood than usual and also affirmed that the right bank route between Shaikh Saad and Kut could always be relied on as free of floods.* There was necessarily a considerable element of uncertainty regarding all opinions and forecasts,† and there always remained the possibility that the Turks would cause abnormal inundations by cutting the river banks.

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* A careful reconnaissance, carried out under General Gorringe's orders on the 18th March, of the route between Shaikh Saad and the vicinity of Es Sinn showed, however, that in several places it was lower than the Tigris right bank between Abu Rumman and Ora, and therefore, liable to inundation.

† On the 15th March, for instance, a sudden rise of three feet in the Tigris in twenty-four hours caused unexpected inundations on the eastern bank of the Hai south of the Dujaila redoubt.

On the 16th March General Lake received information from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff that the anti-German feeling in Turkey was increasing ; that the Russian advance on Kermanshah had caused disquietude in Baghdad ; and that the Russian success at and near Erzerum had caused a diversion of forces and stores which had produced great congestion on the Turkish railways and communications, owing to which the supply of men and munitions for Baghdad was bound to suffer greatly. General Robertson went on to say that he understood that the Turkish difficulties were serious, and that he regarded Halil's overtures as a confirmation of this and as an indication that determined action on our part would assure success. In conclusion he said that he was asking the Russians to assist by action in the direction of Baghdad.

On the 18th, in answer to a query on the subject, General Townshend telegraphed definitely that his supplies would only last till the 15th April.

On the 21st March General Lake reached the front and the same day telegraphed the following to India and London :—†

> "I have fully discussed the situation with Gorringe. After further consideration of the possibilities of using to best advantage our superiority in shipping and artillery, and after a still closer calculation of the time and transport required for march round the Sinn position to the Hai, Gorringe had prior to my arrival come to the conclusion that as a preliminary operation the capture of the Hanna position offered a reasonable chance of success. Subsequent to this, he proposes to work up the river supported by his ships and guns and by this means to hold a large body of the enemy on the left bank until he is able to assault or turn the Sinn position with advantage ; the capture of the Sinn position and actual defeat of enemy's main force being his most important objectives and leading *ipso facto* to the relief of Townshend. His former plan seemed to tend more to a mere junction with and extraction of Townshend than to a decisive defeat of Turks and the eventual retention of Kut in our possession. It also left his lines of communication on the right bank open to attack. After a full consideration of his plan of operations I concur in the same. Circumstances in the

† That evening General Lake went downstream again to Basra, where his presence would be of more use than at the front during the period of preparation for the next advance. He made known at the same time his intention of returning to the front in time for the coming operations.

future may of course develop in such a manner as to force him to modify his intentions and it is desirable to allow for certain elasticity in his plans. I therefore propose to give him freedom of action in this respect."

In fact, General Gorringe had found that not only were his estimates of the dates when the 13th Division transport would reach him incorrect, but also that the right bank route was more liable to inundation by Turkish action than he had been led to believe. Consequently, and in view of the near arrival at the front of heavy artillery and more aeroplanes and also of the good progress of his sapping operations in front of Hanna, he proposed to attack Hanna and then Sannaiyat before tackling the position at Es Sinn. His projected programme of operations was outlined as follows. On the first day, the 13th Division, supported by the 7th Division, and with the 3rd Division and Corps Artillery co-operating on the right bank, would seize the Hanna position. He would then establish his pontoon bridge across the Tigris just above Thorny Nala and move up his boat bridge alongside it. By this time he had received sufficient pontoons and country boats to make two bridges, and by using both of these at once he would be able to transfer a division from one bank of the river to the other in four hours.* He calculated that by the fourth and fifth days he could first capture the Abu Rumman position on the right bank with the 3rd Division, supported by the 7th, and then take the Sannaiyat position with the 13th Division supported by the 7th on the sixth or seventh day. As the enemy would be obliged by the loss of the Sannaiyat position to hold a much longer front on the left bank, General Gorringe hoped to be able to capture, and establish himself along, the Turkish positions running through Nukhailat–Chahela. This would end the first phase of the operations, which, as General Townshend's food would only last till the 15th April, ought to be concluded by the 8th of that month. The plan for the second phase would depend on the conditions then prevailing, especially on the extent and localities of the floods ; but as the Turks would have to hold a long and extended front from the Suwaikiya marsh in the north to the Hai bridge in the south, where they could not be strong everywhere, General Gorringe's superior facilities for transferring forces rapidly from one bank to the other should afford him an opportunity for striking a successful and decisive blow.

* He estimated that under the most favourable conditions the Turks could only move about 3,000 men across the Maqasis ferry in twelve hours.

General Gorringe now bent all his energies on completing his preparations to enable him to commence his advance on the 1st April.

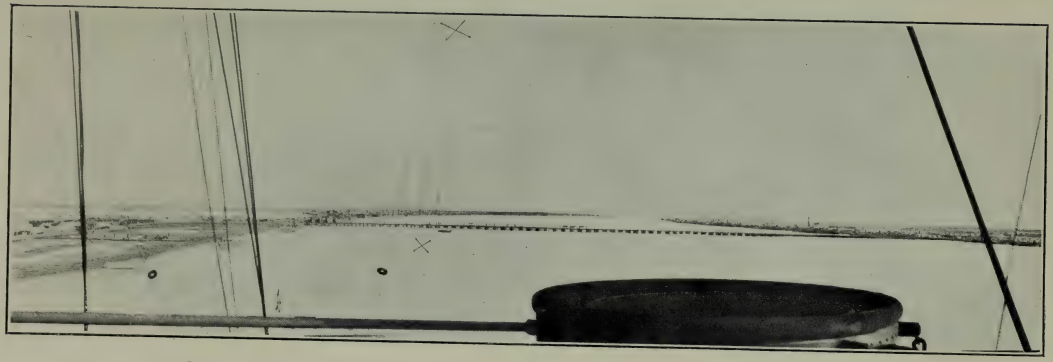
On the 11th March, General Keary had received orders to seize and occupy Mason's Mounds and Abu Rumman, but rain on the 12th stopped all movements; and on the 14th a further postponement was found to be necessary to allow our artillery to deal first with certain enemy guns which had been brought forward on the left bank to command Abu Rumman. On the night of the 14th/15th the river came down in heavy flood,* putting any offensive operations out of the question for the time and also causing a discontinuance of the sapping operations in front of Hanna. The boat bridge was damaged and had to be closed to traffic; the floods closed the road between the advanced base at Shaikh Saad and Wadi camp and rapidly covered the area between Abu Rumman and Mason's Mounds. The embankments along both banks of the river, whose waters were now at a higher level than most of the surrounding country, began to give way and the necessary work on miles of these embankments required the continuous employment of every available man if the whole country were not to be inundated.

One effect of the flood was to isolate the Turkish garrison of Mason's Mounds; and on the morning of the 16th March, under orders from General Keary, General Egerton captured this position by a carefully planned operation and with only slight loss. But the flooded state of the ground still continued to forbid an attack on Abu Rumman.

From the 23rd March onward, when the boat bridge had been re-made, preparations for the assault on Hanna were pushed on.

The description of the situation of the Turkish force on the Tigris at this period, as given by Field-Marshal von der Goltz in a memorandum written to German headquarters on the 23rd March, is sufficiently interesting to allow of a digression. He called it daring and so peculiar as scarcely to have a parallel in military history. Numerically weaker than the British forces opposing it, the Iraq group, as he termed it, was investing Kut weakly and at the same time holding off the relieving force in a position close by. In that position they were astride the 300 yards wide Tigris, with their scanty strength separated by a ferry which was often prevented from working by wind and wave and was open to distant

* Contributed to by a thaw and rainfall in the country south-west of Lake Urmia on 1st–2nd March.



Camp and bridge of boats at Wadi (photograph taken from H.M.S. *Mantis*; March 1916).

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artillery fire from Kut.* The only lines of retreat from this position lay past Kut or over the Hai bridge; and the force was absolutely dependent, for its reinforcements and munitions, on an uncertain line of communication 1,250 miles long. But the Turkish soldier, said Goltz, endured such unusual and unfavourable conditions with the greatest tranquillity and did not allow his attitude to be in the least influenced thereby.†

In this description, however, Goltz seems to have rather overlooked the advantages of the Turkish position astride the Tigris below Kut. Both flanks of their position on the left bank were well secured by river and marsh. On the right bank their strong Sinn entrenchments made a direct advance against them hazardous, while the British, handicapped by the lack of drinking water and insufficient land transport, would find it difficult to detach a sufficient force to make a successful wide turning movement and at the same time ensure that their communications with Shaikh Saad were not severed by a Turkish advance down the Tigris.

By the 24th March all the infantry but one battalion, and the 66th Brigade, R.F.A., of the 13th Division, had reached Shaikh Saad; two of its Engineer Field Companies (72nd and 88th) and the 69th (Howitzer) Brigade, R.F.A., were on their way there by river steamer; and the remainder of the division, including its transport, was moving up by road. The section of road from Qurna to Amara was again open, but it was doubtful if it would be possible to keep the section from Amara to the front open owing to the floods. That day the Tigris rose again to a higher level than before and one that was generally believed to be its maximum, and two days later such a considerable distance on the Amara–Wadi road was inundated as to stop its use completely.

It had been apparent for some days from aeroplane reports that the flood encroachments were a source of considerable trouble to the Turks, especially at Hanna, and on the 24th General Gorringe's artillery partially destroyed dams constructed there to keep the floods out of the trenches. The results appeared so satisfactory that General Lake in a telegram that night to India and London said that it seemed quite possible that the floods might relieve General Gorringe of the necessity for taking Hanna by assault.

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* The ferry was within range of the 5-inch guns in Kut, but the gunners could not observe their fire properly without aeroplanes.

† Von Kiesling, in "Mit Feldmarschall von der Goltz Pascha in Mesopotamien und Persien."

On the 25th General Lake heard from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff that, owing to absolute lack of supplies in the Kermanshah–Khaniqin area and the transport difficulties over the snow-covered passes, the Russians found it impossible to undertake operations in the direction of Baghdad.* On the same day General Gorringe reported that, as steamers were taking two days longer than previously to come up the river, he did not expect to be able to have all his heavy artillery ready to commence operations before the 3rd April.†

Owing to the arrival at the front of additional transport, General Gorringe had been able by this time to effect a considerable improvement in the transport arrangements for his force. The equipment of the 3rd and 7th Divisions and of the Corps Troops with first line pack mules and second line "obligatory" transport had been completed, and some 170 *mahailas* had been organised to carry the remainder of the second line requirements and as supply columns. The 13th Division had so far only their first line mules with them, but their 1,000 transport carts were on the way up and also some 50 general service wagons, which would enable General Gorringe to transport a pontoon bridge overland. In point of fact, these transport carts and general service wagons did not arrive owing to the floods, and the want of them was badly felt during the subsequent operations ;‡ and, as no more *mahailas* were available, some barges had to be diverted to carry the supplies for the division. By this time some light railway material had reached the country from India, and General Gorringe had made preliminary arrangements for a few miles of it to be laid at once from Shaikh Saad towards Kut along the right bank. In this case again, however, shortage of river transport was to prevent its arrival at the front in time to be of assistance for the ensuing operations. The question of assisting the operations by the use of smoke screens was also gone into; but local experiments with a mixture recommended by the War Office were unsuccessful.

* A week later, however, our representative with the Russian Headquarters in the Caucasus telegraphed that Baratoff had been ordered to advance immediately to Khaniqin with all his forces, including his reserves.

† The leading battery of 60-pounders reached the front on the 28th March.

‡ General Gorringe had intended to utilise these carts to put a depot of supplies about eight miles from the Wadi camp south of the Umm al Baram, which would afford him an advanced base for operations against the enemy's right flank.

On the right bank the floods were interfering considerably with forward progress. On the 24th March water inundated the trenches held by the right of the 3rd Division and, although they held on to Mason's Mounds, their main line on the right was forced to withdraw to Thorny Nala ; and they had to restrict their gradual advance towards Abu Rumman to the left of their line.

By the 28th March the British sap-heads on the left bank of the river had reached within 150 yards of the Turkish trenches at Hanna, and the following night General Gorringe sent the machine guns of the 28th and 35th Brigades to take up positions on the right bank, from which they and the machine guns of the 36th Infantry Brigade would co-operate in the coming assault on Hanna. General Christian had been placed specially in command of the machine guns of these three brigades to carry out this co-operation.

Next day General Gorringe reported that, as three aeroplanes on their way to the front could not arrive till the 2nd April, and consequently could not be in action till the 4th, he was postponing the assault on Hanna till the 4th. His seaplanes could only operate when the wind was favourable and it was essential that he should be able to allot some aeroplanes definitely for artillery observation in addition to those required for reconnaissance. It is to be noted that at this time aeroplane reconnaissances were meeting with considerable difficulties, as the British machines built to carry an observer and travel longer distances were at a disadvantage in the air with the German-built aeroplanes used by the Turks, which were lighter and faster machines carrying no observers and not built to go long distances. The British Air Force were also affected by the general shortage of transport ; as, owing to this reason, they were unable to maintain at the front adequate facilities for keeping their machines in the necessary state of repair, a task which climatic effects already rendered sufficiently difficult. However, General Gorringe speaks very highly of the work of our airmen and the way in which they rose superior to all these difficulties.

On the 30th March General Gorringe sent the greater part of the cavalry to take up a screen from Shaikh Saad to the Umm al Baram to protect his left flank and rear during the first phase of the ensuing operations and to take all possible precautions to prevent leakage of information to the enemy.*

* The Turks were constantly sending cavalry patrols round the southern side of the Umm al Baram towards Shaikh Saad.

During the day wire-cutting in front of the Hanna position by British gunfire appeared to produce satisfactory results. On the 31st General Gorringe reported that unless another high flood occurred on or before the 4th April he anticipated that he would complete the first phase of the operations by the original date, namely, 8th April. The river was falling and all information indicated that the level of the last rise (113 feet 10 inches above sea level) was the maximum; but another flood as high would seriously hamper his advance along the left bank, as it would give the Turks the opportunity of flooding the ground eastward of their Sannaiyat position. On the other hand, high floods would, he thought, facilitate his operations along the right bank, owing to the command he had of important canals and to the facilities for water they would offer a large force away from the river.

On the night 31st March/1st April General Gorringe began moving up the 13th Division to take over the trenches in front of Hanna from the 7th Division; but the movement had hardly commenced when heavy rain began to fall and, continuing till the 2nd April, necessitated a postponement of the assault till the morning of the 5th. By the morning of the 4th the relief of the 7th by the 13th Division was completed; but, to prevent the enemy from discovering the presence of this all-British division (commanded by Major-General F. S. Maude), some Indian ranks were retained in the advanced trenches. By noon on the 4th April all the British artillery were in their allotted positions; and by the evening the ground had dried up sufficiently to allow of final orders for the assault next morning. There appeared to be no great change in the enemy's dispositions; though an aeroplane reconnaissance on the previous day had reported a general increase of enemy troops on the left bank eastward of Es Sinn, and also that a second bridge over the Hai had been completed.

General Lake reached Shaikh Saad on the 4th, whence he arranged to keep in close touch with General Gorringe throughout the operations by telephone and by means of a *liaison* officer. By this time the Chief of the Imperial General Staff had sent out Brigadier-General W. Gillman as *liaison* officer between Force "D" and the War Office; and he also joined General Gorringe's headquarters that day.

In making preparations for the next attempt at relief, Force Headquarters had done all that was possible with the available river craft to comply with General Gorringe's demands for troops, ammunition, ordnance, medical and other warlike

stores ; but in doing so they had been obliged to reduce the amount of food sent up the river. On the 2nd April, however, they drew General Gorringe's attention to the fact that he had only seven or eight days' rations left at the front for his force and that it would, in consequence, be necessary for him to reduce considerably his other demands for the immediate future. At this time 32 guns, 350 sabres, 2,600 rifles, 1,400 carts and wagons and 900 pack mules were moving up to the front by road, but were so delayed by the heavy rain and floods that it was now evident that they could not reach the front in time ; and, recognising that there was now no means of accelerating their movement, General Gorringe, in replying to Force Headquarters that he agreed to the necessity for giving food supplies precedence of transportation, stated his opinion that the detachments and transport marching up must be halted at or near Amara. Thus, once again, bad weather and shortage of river transport prevented the timely concentration of the maximum available force at the decisive point.

General Gorringe had now available for his advance a total effective combatant strength of just over 30,000 rifles and 127 guns. From a perusal of the details of this force in Appendix XXVI, it is evident that there were certain elements of weakness in its constitution which were bound to affect its fighting efficiency. In some cases, owing to the heavy losses incurred, two battalions had been formed into one composite battalion, and in others, notably in the 3rd and 7th Divisions and 35th and 36th Brigades, battalions were either very weak in strength or mainly composed of details for units in Kut. Moreover, all battalions, apart from a great shortage of efficient non-commissioned officers, included a large proportion of very young officers and men with only limited military training and experience, this being especially the case in the 13th Division which had lost very heavily in the Dardanelles operations.

There were available in the combined Air Force (Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service) eight aeroplanes and three seaplanes ; and the Naval flotilla present consisted of four gunboats (*Mantis*, *Mayfly*, *Sawfly*, and *Waterfly*), and the armed despatch boat *Flycatcher*.*

At nightfall on the 4th April, General Gorringe's troops held the following positions.

* *Grayfly* was at Shaikh Saad. *Flycatcher*, a Thornycroft patrol launch, had been captured from the Turks early in the campaign.

On the Tigris left bank, on the front some 1,300 yards long between marsh and river and about 150 yards distant from the Turkish front line at Hanna, were the 13th Division infantry. The 38th Brigade were on the right, the 39th in the centre, and the 40th on the left, each brigade having one battalion in front line ; and with the remainder of each brigade in support was a half field company R.E. (72nd and 88th). In trenches some nine hundred yards in rear was General Maude's reserve, consisting of the 8th Welch Pioneers and his remaining half field company R.E. (72nd).

Forty-six guns were in position in rear of the 13th Division, protected on their northern flank by a detachment of the 35th Infantry Brigade ; and behind them was the 7th Division, less its artillery.

At Wadi camp (left bank) were the 16th Cavalry, 12th and 13th Sapper and Miner Companies (detailed for bridging operations), No. 1 Bridging Train, a company 12th Pioneers, and the remainder of the 35th Infantry Brigade.

On the Tigris right bank, the 8th and 37th Brigades of the 3rd Division occupied a line along, and in places in advance of, Thorny Nala, with the remainder of the Division in support. Of General Keary's 26 guns, 22 were facing westward to support his advanced line.

Detachments of the 36th Infantry Brigade, with the machine-gun batteries of the 28th, 35th and 36th Brigades, were in position facing the flank of the Turkish Hanna trenches ; and 55 guns of the Corps Artillery were also in positions to take these trenches in enfilade.

At the Wadi camp (right bank) were the 23rd Mountain Battery, the remainder of the 36th Infantry Brigade and No. 2 Bridging Train.

The Cavalry Brigade were holding the screen Umm al Baram–Shaikh Saad, where were a few other units recently arrived.

The 41st Infantry Brigade was on its way up the river and the 42nd Brigade was at Basra. Both these brigades had recently arrived from India.*

General Gorringe estimated that the total strength of the Turks round and below Kut might amount to 1,300 cavalry,

* The 41st Brigade was composed of 1/4th Devonshire, 2/4th Gurkhas, 1/8th Gurkhas and 45th Sikhs, the last having been transferred from the 42nd Brigade in relief of the 126th Baluchistan Infantry diverted from Force " D " on account of its large Mahomedan element. The 42nd Brigade consisted of 1/4th Dorsetshire, 2/5th Gurkhas and 2/6th Gurkhas.

30,500 infantry and 88 guns and that they were disposed somewhat as follows :—

Shumran and Kut—45th Division—5,000 infantry and 21 guns.

Left bank positions Hanna–Fallahiya	51st and part of 52nd Division	5,900 infantry	40 guns and 300 cavalry.
Sannaiyat—Part 52nd Division		3,000 infantry	
Es Sinn, left bank—41st Division		5,000 infantry	
Right bank positions from Abu Rumman to the Hai.	35th and 2nd Divisions and part of another division of unknown number.		11,600 infantry, 27 guns and 1,000 cavalry.

We now know that this estimate was too high. It is understood that the Turks only had the 35th, 45th, 51st, 52nd and part of the 2nd Division, giving them a total strength of about 20,000 infantry.

On the left bank the Turkish position in the Hanna defile consisted of five entrenched lines one behind the other covering a depth of about one and a half miles, with a number of gun positions behind the third line* and a wire entanglement—reported to have been mostly destroyed by our gunfire—in front of their advanced line. On the right bank their forward position, just east of the Abu Rumman Mounds, ran roughly southward from the Tigris for about two miles.

In his operation order† General Gorringe announced his intention (*a*) to assault and capture the enemy's Hanna position at 4.55 a.m.‡ on the 5th April, and (*b*) to seize and entrench an advanced position along a north-to-south line from the Suwaikiya marsh to the northern extremity of the Fallahiya bend and to push forward along the enemy's communication trenches and the river *bund* as far as possible, preparatory to attacking the Sannaiyat position.

The 13th Division, after capturing the second line of the enemy's Hanna position, was to consolidate it preparatory to attacking the third line ; and the 7th Division was to be in readiness to support them.

The 3rd Division on the right bank was to contain the enemy in front of them and also to prevent by fire any enemy movement on the left bank between the Fallahiya bend and the Suwaikiya marsh.

The 35th and 36th Infantry Brigades, less detachments, were to protect Wadi camp, while the Cavalry Brigade prevented any enemy movement against the left and rear.

* About seven hundred yards behind their advanced line.

† This had been issued on the 1st April with blanks left for the subsequent entry of dates and hours.

‡ Sunrise was about 5.45 a.m.

The artillery was divided into three groups, viz., a total of 22 guns on the right bank with the 3rd Division under General Keary, a total of 44 guns on the left bank under Lieutenant-Colonel Musgrave, and the Corps Artillery, consisting of 55 guns on the right bank and 2 on the left bank, under Brigadier-General White.*

The assault of the 13th Division was not to be preceded by artillery bombardment, but at 4.58 a.m., i.e., three minutes after the time for commencement of the assault, Colonel Musgrave's group and the Corps Artillery were to open a heavy bombardment of the enemy's third line and the approaches to it from the west; and when the infantry of the 13th Division moved forward from the enemy's second line the artillery was to maintain a barrage in front of them as they advanced.

Colonel Musgrave's ten batteries were divided into three groups (each of them affiliated with an infantry brigade, to accompany which they each detailed a *liaison* officer) and a reserve battery (19th) at General Maude's disposal. In addition an artillery forward observation officer accompanied each battalion of the 13th Division.

The Corps Artillery were arranged in counter-battery, enfilading, and breaching and barrage groups.

The naval guns would also co-operate in the bombardment; and when the artillery opened fire General Christian's machine guns would start their enfilading fire against the Turkish third line and the area west of it. The machine gun batteries of the 19th and 21st Brigades, with a "pom-pom" gun, were to take up a position to the right rear of the 13th Division and be ready for action under General Maude's orders.

General Gorringe's own headquarters would be near the position then occupied by the 7th Division.

The 13th Division had received special training for this attack after a careful study by General Maude and his officers of our own trench system and of those of the enemy as shown

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* The 3rd Divisional artillery consisted of the 4th Brigade, R.F.A. (18 guns) and A/69th Battery (4 howitzers). The four guns of the 23rd Mountain Battery in Wadi camp also belonged to this group.

The artillery under Lieutenant-Colonel Musgrave included the 9th and 66th Brigades, R.F.A., less one section (32 guns—the 66th Brigade consisting of four 4-gun batteries), D/69th Battery (4 howitzers) and the 72nd and 77th Batteries, R.G.A. (8 howitzers).

The Corps Artillery consisted of the 13th Brigade, R.F.A. (18 guns), B/69th and C/69th Batteries (8 howitzers), 1/1st and 1/3rd Sussex Batteries (eight 15-pounder guns), 60th and 61st Batteries (12 howitzers), 2/86th and 2/104th Heavy Batteries (eight 60-pounder guns), one 6-inch howitzer and the 1/104th Heavy Battery (two 4-inch guns, which were on the left bank).

by our air photographs. General Maude's operation order was drawn out in considerable detail on the lines that experience in the trench warfare in France had shown to be necessary ; and in his final paragraph he emphasised the necessity for discipline, determination and dash.

At 4.55 a.m. on the 5th April, the 13th Division moved forward to the assault and, meeting with only slight opposition, carried the enemy's first and second lines in quick succession. A further immediate advance was only rendered impossible by the fire of the British artillery, who, not knowing that there was no enemy opposition and being unable in the dim light to distinguish the infantry signals, did not lift their fire until about 5.35 a.m. A few minutes later, the Turkish third line was occupied and found empty ; and, continuing to advance, the 13th Division had occupied the enemy's fourth and fifth lines by 7 a.m. It appears that the Turks had evacuated the position during the night, leaving only a small infantry rear guard with a few machine guns to hold their front line. Turkish prisoners captured that morning said that the evacuation had been forced on them by flood encroachments, and this may well have been the case. Whatever the reason, their retreat had been well carried out and in the nick of time. General Gorringe heard of this evacuation about 6.30 a.m. from his airmen and also that the Turks were holding their Fallahiya and Abu Rumman positions and reinforcing strongly their Sannaiyat position.

At 7.30 a.m. General Maude sent forward General Lewin's 40th Infantry Brigade with orders to secure a line between river and marsh some 2,000 yards eastward of the Fallahiya position, while the two other brigades reformed. This Turkish position extended northward to the marsh from the northern extremity of the Fallahiya bend and was believed to consist of several lines of trenches. The 40th Brigade as they advanced came under a gradually increasing rifle, machine gun and gun-fire, but they pushed on and occupied a line somewhat in advance of that indicated to them. Here, as most of them were in the open without cover, they sustained fairly heavy casualties. General Maude had also sent orders at 7.30 a.m. to Colonel Musgrave's artillery to advance to positions from which they could bombard the Fallahiya trenches.

At 8.40 a.m. General O'Dowda's 38th Infantry Brigade was ordered to advance to the line indicated an hour before to the 40th Brigade and to entrench its northern half while the 40th Brigade extended to the Tigris on its left ; and General Cayley's

39th Brigade was at the same time told to move to a position about twelve hundred yards behind the centre of the line and remain in reserve. The 38th Brigade complied with this order, but the 40th, who had advanced some seven hundred yards past the line indicated to them, were too heavily engaged with the enemy to be able to move towards the Tigris.

By 10 a.m. the greater part of Colonel Musgrave's artillery had advanced and were in action against the Fallahiya trenches. Some twenty minutes later General Maude, hearing of the 40th Brigade situation, ordered the 39th Brigade to send forward a battalion to fill in the gap between the 40th Brigade and the Tigris. This battalion (9th Worcestershire) in advancing lost its direction and joined the left battalion of the 40th Brigade.

General Gorringe had by this time received further air reports confirming the earlier information of the enemy dispositions on the left bank, and showing that the Turks were busy digging at their Sannaiyat position; and he resolved to keep up the utmost pressure on the Turks and, by giving them no rest, prevent them from settling down in the Fallahiya and Sannaiyat positions. Moreover, the river was rising again and General Gorringe was apprehensive lest the Turks might cut the river *bunds* and flood the country in front of their trenches, thus stopping a further British advance. About 9.15 a.m. he sent orders to General Younghusband to come to Corps headquarters, where General Gorringe told him that the 13th Division would attack the Fallahiya position at midday and that the 7th Division would follow up a success there by attacking the northern half of the Sannaiyat position at dawn the next morning (6th). General Younghusband on returning to his own division, which was engaged in making roads through and clearing up the Hanna position,* issued preliminary instructions to the 19th and 28th Infantry Brigades.

About 10.30 a.m. General Maude ordered the 38th and 39th Infantry Brigades and the 19th Battery, R.F.A., to advance to the support of the 40th Infantry Brigade. The infantry of the 38th and 39th Brigades, advancing to the right and left respectively of the 40th Brigade, were met by such a heavy hostile fire that they were checked two to three hundred yards short of the line occupied by the latter; and were forced to dig themselves such cover as they could in these positions.

* The 3rd Sapper Company and 107th Pioneers by 9 a.m. made three roads through our own and the enemy trenches for the forward movement of guns and wheeled vehicles. They also rendered thirty Turkish ground mines harmless, made two other roads for stretcher bearers, repaired the river *bunds* and searched the river banks for mine connections.

At 11 a.m. General Gorringe went forward to 13th Division headquarters to ascertain the situation and found that General Maude had issued orders for an attack on Fallahiya to be made at 12.30 p.m. The day had grown very hot, the mirage had become strong, and as the attack would, owing to marsh and river, have to be a frontal one over ground devoid of cover, orders were issued under instructions from General Gorringe at 12.15 p.m. that the attack was to be postponed till nightfall, the infantry in the meantime maintaining their positions.

While these operations had been taking place on the left bank, the 3rd Division on the right bank had also been making progress. During the night of the 4th/5th their patrols had found the greater part of the flooded area to their front impassable for troops for a distance of some one and a half miles southward of the river bank, but early in the morning of the 5th British air reports indicated that the enemy were evacuating the Abu Rumman position ; and in consequence the 8th and 37th Brigade commanders received instructions to advance on their own initiative if they saw an opportunity of doing so. The leading troops of both brigades pushed forward and soon after 10 a.m. occupied the enemy front trenches without much difficulty. A British aeroplane, in the meantime, reported some 1,600 enemy infantry marching back towards Chahela, and a general advance was ordered. This advance met with practically no opposition, and before noon the whole of the Abu Rumman position was in the hands of the 8th and 37th Brigades. These were joined soon afterwards by the 7th Brigade, which came up in the line on their left, with the two squadrons divisional cavalry (33rd) on their outer flank. At that time, according to British air reports, the nearest enemy troops were some 1,000 infantry at Bait Isa and 2,000 cavalry with six guns south-west of the Umm al Baram.

Early in the afternoon, after receiving air reports that about 3,500 enemy infantry had been observed near the Sinn Abtar and Dujaila redoubts, General Gorringe sent orders to the 3rd Division to consolidate their position preparatory to an advance next morning. About 3.45 p.m. an enemy force of some 3,500 infantry, two batteries of artillery and a cavalry brigade, advanced towards Abu Rumman, but the 3rd Division kept them at a distance without much difficulty, and before evening most of them appeared to have withdrawn. The 8th, 37th and 7th Brigades now held a line extending for nearly four miles southward from the Tigris, the portion held by the

8th Brigade on the river bank being about a mile in front of, though joined up with, the rest of the line and reaching to nearly opposite the enemy position at Sannaiyat on the opposite bank.

During the afternoon, 13th Division patrols reported that the main strength of the enemy holding the Fallahiya position appeared to be massed about the centre, facing the long main communication trench which ran from Hanna to Sannaiyat, while the left of the position seemed to be only weakly held; and our aeroplanes reported reinforcements estimated at a total of over 6,000 men as having moved during the day into the Sannaiyat position, where there was great digging activity.

Just before 5 p.m. General Maude issued orders for the attack on Fallahiya. The actual assault was timed for 7.45 p.m., and was to be supported by the British artillery on both banks of the river. About 7 p.m. the 38th and 39th Brigades, which passing through the 40th Brigade were to deliver the assault, began forming up in four lines, and at 7.15 the artillery bombardment commenced. The four lines of the 38th Brigade consisted each of one battalion on a frontage of one thousand yards, the 6th Loyal North Lancashire being in front, with the 6th King's Own, 6th East Lancashire and the 6th South Lancashire behind them in that order. The 39th Brigade commander, with only three battalions, formed each of his four lines of a company from each battalion; the 7th North Staffordshire being on the right, the 9th Worcestershire in the centre, and the 9th Royal Warwickshire on the left.

At 7.35 p.m. the 38th and 39th Brigades began their advance; and, in spite of strong resistance by the enemy, the 38th Brigade had, by a fine advance, captured their objective by 8.15 p.m. Not long afterwards the 39th Brigade, whose advance had been delayed by the broken ground over which their forward movement lay, also captured their portion of the position.

During the day the total British casualties amounted to 1,885; of these 1,868 occurred in the 13th Division,* mostly during the attack on Fallahiya.

The Turkish position proved to consist of a series of trenches which were nowhere in a continuous line nor as great in depth as had been shown on the British sketch maps, and the Turkish garrison was said to have consisted of only three battalions. It thus appears that the Turks only held this position to gain time.

* The 5th Wiltshire lost 248 men, the 8th Cheshire 207 and the 9th Royal Warwickshire 203; while the 9th Worcestershire, 7th North Staffordshire and 8th Royal Welch Fusiliers had each nearly 200 casualties.

The captured trenches were consolidated and were taken over from the 13th Division by the 21st Brigade of the 7th Division. This relief took some time and was not completed till after midnight, when the 13th Division withdrew to bivouacs in rear.†

General Gorringe had gathered from his air reports that the Turks had no trenches on the extreme left of their Sannaiyat position, where the ground had previously been covered by flood water from the Suwaikiya marsh. This area had recently been left bare by a recession of the waters and seemed to offer an opportunity for attack which might be only temporary; as, if given time, the Turks might entrench there or the floods might again cover it. The sketch maps of the period showing the location of the Turkish trenches were not very accurate, but it seemed almost impossible for an attacking force to lose its way, as the main communication trench from Fallahiya alongside a flood embankment led directly into the Sannaiyat position. The distance from Fallahiya to Sannaiyat was about two and three-quarter miles and it seemed to General Gorringe that the 7th Division should be able under cover of darkness to gain the Turkish flank and turn it.

At 7.30 p.m. General Younghusband had issued orders for the assault which was to be delivered at 4.55 a.m. next morning (6th). The postponement till after dark of the assault on Fallahiya prevented his carrying out a reconnaissance of his line of advance, as he had at first arranged to do. But his troops were ordered to advance with their left on the communication trench and were to assault the northern flank of the Turkish position, which consisted of three lines of trenches at about one hundred yards distance from each other. The 19th and 28th Brigades were to advance in line at 1.15 a.m. from a position of assembly some two miles eastward of Fallahiya, the 19th, which was to direct, being on the left; and the 21st Brigade was to follow them in reserve from Fallahiya. Silence, quickness and dash, said General Younghusband, were the essential elements of success, and there was to be no hesitation in brushing aside any slight opposition met with during the advance or in carrying through the assault.

The 19th and 28th Brigades arrived punctually at the position of assembly, but some delay and confusion was caused during their concentration by the passage through them of units and

† This movement of the 13th Division seems to have given the rest of the force the impression that it was preparatory to moving across the river to support an advance along the right bank.

wounded of the 13th Division moving back from Fallahiya; and the advance from the position of assembly did not commence till nearly 2 a.m. It was a very dark night. According to the orders issued, each brigade was to advance with two battalions in its front line, each battalion being in two lines of platoons in fours at twenty yards interval with six yards distance between lines; and battalions in rear were to move in an almost similar formation. General Kemball, the senior of the two brigadiers, decided, however, in view of the continued movement of bodies of the 13th Division through the position of assembly, that to attempt an advance in the formation ordered would only lead to great dispersion and probable loss of direction, and he ordered both brigades to advance in columns of fours.

During the advance to Fallahiya, other bodies of the 13th Division were encountered, marching back or bivouacked in trenches and ditches across the line of advance; and these caused some more delay. At Fallahiya, much further loss of time was caused by the passage of the trenches, as the 21st Brigade staff was still imperfectly acquainted with the exact location and intricacies of these; and consequently, on at least one occasion, the 19th and 28th Brigades lost their way and had to counter-march. In fact such delay occurred that, when the Fallahiya trenches had been successfully negotiated, General Kemball told the General Staff Officer of the 7th Division, who was accompanying the leading brigades, that in view of the distance still remaining to be traversed, it would, in General Kemball's opinion, be impossible to deliver the assault before dawn; and he suggested that General Younghusband should be asked to come forward and decide if the assault should be attempted. General Kemball, himself, was of opinion that it would be better to push forward as far as possible before daylight and then entrench. It is clear that there was great uncertainty among officers of these two brigades as to the exact distance between the Fallahiya and Sannaiyat trenches, as a fresh sketch map, issued on the 5th April as a result of the latest air reconnaissances, showed the distance to be at least three and three-quarter miles, i.e., a mile longer than it had been supposed to be when General Gorringe had given General Younghusband the orders for the attack. Subsequent experience seems to show that the longer distance was correct.

About 4 a.m., an advanced platoon of the Highland Battalion of the 19th Brigade, moving well in advance of the brigade

along the communication trench, encountered an enemy piquet, which fell back. Some three-quarters of an hour later, when the guides of the 19th Brigade calculated that they had advanced some 4,500 paces (rather over two miles) beyond the Fallahiya trenches, orders were issued for both brigades to form into lines of platoon columns. This brought the composite Highland battalion (Black Watch and Seaforths) and 28th Punjabis, in this order from the left, into the front line of the 19th Brigade, with the 125th Rifles and 92nd Punjabis in second line. The 28th Brigade formed into three lines: 51st Sikhs (on the left) and Provisional Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry* in first line; 2/Leicestershire in second line, and 53rd Sikhs and 56th Rifles in third line. General Peebles halted his 19th Brigade considering the circumstances required a wider deployment, but the dawning light showed him the 28th Brigade, still advancing, three or four hundred yards ahead. The 19th started to catch the 28th up, when orders were issued to both brigades to extend into attack formation.

By this time General Younghusband had come up and joined General Kemball, who offered the opinion that they were still a mile from the Turkish trenches. In point of fact they appear to have been still farther away. General Younghusband, however, believed them to be closer and decided that the assault should be made. General Kemball, who had halted the 28th Brigade to allow the 19th Brigade to draw level, now ordered the 28th to push on.† At 5.30 a.m. both brigades were advancing and, although it was light enough to distinguish objects within about half a mile, the enemy's trenches could not be discerned. It was seen, however, that the north-west wind, which had begun that morning, was driving the waters of the Suwaikiya marsh southward, and this had already contracted the front between the marsh and communication trench to about 350 or 400 yards.

The Turks were evidently fully prepared for the attack,‡ for five minutes later a storm of machine gun and rifle fire, followed immediately by gunfire from both banks of the river, fell on the 28th Brigade, who were still leading, and then on the 19th Brigade. The enemy trenches could still not be discerned, but the gallant 28th Brigade dashed forward in a desperate attempt to carry out their orders. The Oxfords under

* Battalion improvised from drafts for the 1st Battalion in Kut.

† It appears that the whole brigade had not extended by then.

‡ In addition to the piquet driven back along the communication trench, they had observers with telephones lying out in front of their left.

Major Carter and the 51st Sikhs under Lieutenant-Colonel Ferguson-Davie, managed to advance about two hundred yards before they were stopped by the Turkish fire, described by Edmund Candler, the official eye-witness, as a "torrent of death."* On this same date, one hundred and four years previously, at Badajoz, the Oxfords—then the 43rd and 52nd Regiments of Light Infantry—had covered themselves with glory by their stern endurance of extraordinarily heavy casualties; and their successors now displayed no less unyielding fortitude, for out of 13 officers and 266 other ranks in action in this attack on Sannaiyat, all the officers and 220 other ranks were either killed or wounded. The 51st Sikhs and Leicestershire also lost very heavily, their casualties amounting to nearly fifty per cent. of their effective strengths.

The Oxfords and 51st Sikhs had reached a line some five hundred yards† distant from the enemy trenches, with the Leicestershire about three hundred yards behind them. On their left the 19th Brigade had also been stopped by the heavy Turkish fire, but, being still somewhat in rear of the 28th Brigade, its front line was about eleven hundred yards from the Turkish trenches.‡ To advance further over the open plain in face of this fire without artillery support was out of the question, and General Kemball§ ordered his third line (53rd and 56th) to halt and entrench; and the 19th Brigade followed their example.

The 9th Brigade, R.F.A., following the 7th Division infantry, had been stopped by the Fallahiya trenches at about 2.30 a.m., but had advanced again as soon as it became light enough for them to pick their way; and as soon as the enemy opened fire they hurried forward and came into action to the north-west of the Fallahiya bend. Here they were gradually joined by the rest of the artillery on the left bank of the river; and their fire, with that of the artillery on the right bank, kept the enemy fire sufficiently under to allow the 7th Division infantry to consolidate the lines which the greater part of the survivors had reached.

At 7 a.m. General Younghusband sent the following report to Corps headquarters: "Situation as follows: Front line

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* "The Long Road to Baghdad."

† This distance is taken from the official records, but it appears from the subsequent accounts to have been over 600 yards.

‡ In the dim light, some of the British artillery supporting fire appears to have been misdirected and consequently fell on the attacking infantry.

§ About this time General Kemball and three officers with him, including his staff officers, were wounded; but General Kemball insisted on remaining in command till the afternoon, when he was removed to an ambulance.

got within about four hundred yards of the enemy. It cannot advance or retire and cannot be reinforced. My troops are now dug in, but require entrenching tools to dig better cover. Cannot move at present, but with support can renew my attack after dark. Hostile fire, both infantry and artillery, has been very heavy, and any movement at all draws heavy fire. Casualties reported very heavy." About 9.15 a.m., after sending General Younghusband orders to consolidate the position gained, General Gorringe visited 7th Division headquarters, which were just behind the 28th Brigade; and as a result of his discussion there with General Younghusband he decided that the 7th Division, reinforced by the 40th Infantry Brigade, should attack again during the night.

At 10 a.m. the 40th Brigade were sent forward to Fallahiya in readiness to join in the coming attack. But adverse weather conditions once more interfered with the British plans. Under the influence of the north-west wind, the water of the marsh invaded the trenches on the right of the 7th Division and, in spite of strenuous efforts to combat it carried out under continuous hostile fire, by 1 p.m. the advanced trenches of the 28th Brigade and the northern portion of the trenches in rear of them had to be evacuated. Many of the guns were surrounded by water and were only kept on dry ground by encircling them with earth banks. The Tigris, too, had risen rapidly and by midday had overlapped its highest level that year, with the result that there was a serious danger of river and marsh meeting and inundating the whole of the hitherto dry area.* As all efforts had to be devoted to prevent this, General Gorringe had no option but to countermand his orders for the night attack; and this was done at 2.40 p.m. The encroachment of the marsh seemed to be causing the enemy also considerable trouble on his left flank.

During the morning General Townshend, seeing considerable activity there, had directed the fire of his 5-inch guns at the Maqasis ferry, and appears to have caused a suspension of ferrying until about 9 a.m. when the mirage necessitated a cessation of fire. In the afternoon again ferrying activity induced him to order further firing. The effects of these bombardments are unknown.

* It is of interest to note that, before the operations in April commenced, a scheme had been drawn up for draining much of the water from the Suwaikiya marsh into the Tigris, thus laying the Turkish left flank open. But when the floods raised the Tigris waters to a higher level than that of the marsh, this idea had to be abandoned.

During the early afternoon the hostile fire decreased, and some of the 51st Sikhs and Leicestershire managed to withdraw from their precarious advanced positions and join their brigade entrenchments in rear. Some of the wounded also were brought in, it being the general experience that day that the Turks refrained carefully from firing on stretcher parties. Between 5 and 7 p.m. the Turks subjected the new British position to a somewhat heavy bombardment, but this had little effect. The total casualties during the day of the 19th and 28th Brigades amounted to 1,168. During the 5th and 6th April Sir William Vincent and General Bingley had been present watching the evacuation of the wounded, and they came to the conclusion that, except for a lack of ambulance transport, the arrangements were generally satisfactory. For the first time on the Tigris front there had been present a few motor ambulances.

At 7.40 p.m. some of the British artillery, on both banks, started to bombard the Sannaiyat position to mislead the Turks and to cover an advance which General Gorringe had ordered the 3rd Division to make along the right bank. This bombardment appears to have had the desired effect, for the 8th and 37th Brigades moved forward without encountering resistance. By 11 p.m. the 8th Brigade, supported by the 1/1st Gurkhas of the 9th Brigade, had established themselves with machine guns along the river bank facing northward, whence they could enfilade the Sannaiyat entrenchments. The 37th Brigade covered the left of the 8th Brigade and took up a line running southwards, which was continued by the 7th Brigade to within two miles of the Umm al Baram.

That night the Tigris overflowed near Abu Rumman, causing an inundation behind the right of the 3rd Division and to the west of Thorny Nala, increasing the existing flood to such an extent that it began to move towards the Umm al Baram.

On the left bank after the close of the British bombardment there was little firing; during the night the remainder of the wounded were collected under cover of patrols; and the battalions of the 7th Division completed their organisation.

Early next morning (7th April) General Younghusband visited the trenches and conferred with his brigadiers, learning from them that the Turks were holding the Sannaiyat position in strength. At 7 a.m. the British artillery on both banks and the naval gunboats opened fire on the Turkish trenches, and during this bombardment General Younghusband visited General Gorringe at his headquarters at Fallahiya.

As mentioned before, General Gorringe had come to the conclusion that, in view of General Townshend's food limit, he must obtain possession of the Sannaiyat position by the 8th April. The failure of the attempt on the 6th, while reducing his own strength without much advantage, had given the Turks more time in which to strengthen their position; and from General Younghusband's report they appeared to have made the most of their opportunity. The advanced trenches of the 7th Division were still rather too far from the Turkish position for an assault from them to offer good chances of success; and the way in which the floods had contracted the front of attack between river and marsh was also to the disadvantage of the attackers. It had so far been found impossible, owing to the high wind, rough water and rising flood in the river, to bring up the rafts of pontoons for the projected bridge on the eastern side of the Fallahiya bend; and the inundations on the right bank made all movement between Wadi camp and the 3rd Division trenches very difficult. For the time being, therefore, alternative operations along the right bank offered little chance of success; and General Gorringe decided that the 7th Division should advance, without committing itself to an engagement, as far as possible and then entrench, preparatory to making another advance during the ensuing night.

Returning to his headquarters, General Younghusband issued verbal orders for the advance to commence at 9.15 a.m. The 28th Brigade would be on the right, the 19th in the centre, and the 21st, advancing in echelon, on the left, each brigade being supported by three or four artillery batteries on the left bank. The 19th Brigade, which was somewhat behind the 28th Brigade, began the advance and, as they drew level, the 28th Brigade also moved forward, while the 21st Brigade moved to the southward to get into their position in echelon. To cover the advance the 28th Brigade had sent four machine guns with a detachment of the Leicestershire a few hundred yards to their right front, and as the advancing infantry got level with these machine guns the Turks opened a very heavy fire with guns, machine guns and rifles. The infantry then called on their affiliated batteries for artillery support and this was given. It was now about 9.40 a.m., and the four leading battalions of the division, 53rd and 56th of the 28th Brigade and 92nd and 125th of the 19th Brigade, had managed in spite of heavy losses to push forward for about three hundred yards; but the heavy enemy fire now brought them to a standstill. The 28th Brigade, again somewhat in advance of the 19th,

were about eight hundred yards from the Turkish trenches, while the 19th Brigade, about one thousand yards from the enemy, had moved so far to the left that there was no room between them and the Tigris for the 21st Brigade. In these positions, under cover of artillery fire and the enfilading fire of the 8th Infantry Brigade on the right bank of the river, they entrenched themselves, but the enemy fire was so heavy that no reinforcements were able to reach them. During the remainder of the day the British artillery and the machine guns of the 8th Infantry Brigade kept up an intermittent fire on the Turkish position. During the morning also General Townshend, who had been told of the situation, directed the fire of his 5-inch guns on the Maqasis ferry until the mirage rendered it invisible about 10.30 a.m.

In the afternoon, finding that the commanders of the 19th and 28th Brigades agreed with his own opinion that it would be advisable to postpone another assault for twenty-four hours, to enable them to push their advanced trenches nearer to the enemy, General Younghusband visited General Gorringe and obtained his concurrence to such a postponement; and at the same time he told General Gorringe that a partial reconnaissance by the 28th Brigade seemed to indicate that it might be possible to get round the enemy's left flank by wading through the Suwaikiya marsh.* General Gorringe accordingly came to the decision to assault the Sannaiyat position at dawn on the 9th April with the 13th and 7th Divisions. In the meantime during the night of the 7th/8th the 7th Division were to push their trenches forward for about three hundred yards, and to make a fuller reconnaissance of the Suwaikiya marsh with a view to a turning movement; officers of the 13th Division were to make a reconnaissance of the approaches to the Sannaiyat position, and an artillery battery was to dig itself in on the right bank of the river in the 8th Brigade position so as to enfilade the main Sannaiyat trench. This last action was, however, reported as impracticable by the 3rd Division, as at this point the right bank of the river was commanded by the left, and it was also considered inadvisable to put guns in the infantry trenches along the river bank.

The rafts of pontoons only began to arrive at the site for the new bridge about noon on the 7th April, as the steamers towing them could only make very slow progress against the strong current. This current also much delayed construction

* This reconnaissance had been ordered that morning by General Gorringe.

during the afternoon and night, and caused complete suspension of the work from 1 a.m. till daylight on the 8th.

Some enemy activity was observed during the day on the right bank, south-westward of the 3rd Division positions ; but on troops moving out there, it was found that only small parties of mounted Turks and Arabs were involved.

After dark the 21st Brigade moved up into line on the left of the 19th Brigade, giving each of them a frontage of four to five hundred yards. As had been previously arranged, at 9 p.m. the British artillery carried out a five minutes bombardment of the Turkish trenches followed by a discharge of rockets. This had the desired effect, for the Turks sent up flares all along their line and manning their trenches opened a heavy fire ; when the British artillery again carried out a short bombardment. Two hours later, when the moon had set, the three brigades of the 7th Division made a successful advance of two to three hundred yards and dug a new line of entrenchments. In the case of the 28th Brigade on the right, this line was just beyond the line of dead marking the furthest point reached on the 6th.

Throughout the night patrols were active on both sides. From these and by enquiry from the 7th Division, officers of the 13th Division ascertained that the front of the enemy trenches, for at any rate four hundred yards northward from the Tigris and probably further, was covered by a breast-high wire entanglement uncut by artillery fire but with gaps in it ; also that there were floods and several water-cuts in front of this entanglement extending northwards from the Tigris for about three hundred yards over an area about one hundred and fifty yards wide. A junior General Staff Officer with another officer of the 7th Division reconnoitred the Suwaikiya marsh, succeeded in crossing an arm of it some 4,000 yards wide and landed without discovery by the enemy about two miles north-westward of their left flank. Their return journey across the marsh took them about one and a half hours, and they reported that they had found the marsh nowhere more than three feet deep, with a hard bottom. They considered the route practicable for a brigade of infantry and a mountain battery.

At 7 a.m. on the 8th April General Younghusband made a personal report at Corps headquarters of the progress that his division had made during the night, and of the result of the reconnaissance of the Suwaikiya marsh ; and an hour later he returned to his own headquarters with instructions that one of his brigades with a mountain battery was to cross the marsh

during the night and co-operate with the frontal assault to be made by the 13th Division at dawn on the 9th. The 21st Brigade was detailed for this operation, and all preparations for it were in train when the order was countermanded and General Younghusband received instructions that the whole of the 7th Division infantry would concentrate on the right of the 13th Division and be held in readiness to assist the assault of that division. General Gorringe had come to the conclusion that an advance through the marsh was too hazardous an undertaking. A change of wind might increase the depth of water at any moment ; the bottom would cut up under the traffic of men and laden mules, and the result of the heavy going would be uncertain ; if the main attack failed the brigade across the marsh would be isolated and exposed to the full brunt of a Turkish counter-attack in force, while its withdrawal in daylight under effective hostile fire might lead to disaster ; and, finally, he considered that the brigade could be as, if not more, usefully employed in supporting the right of the 13th Division with the rest of the 7th Division.

The bridge at the Fallahiya bend was completed by noon, but owing to the floods on the right bank the direct route from the bridge to the 3rd Division positions could not be traversed, and a deviation had to be made south-eastward via Thorny Nala. These floods continued to extend, with the result that those portions of the 3rd Division and other troops upstream of Mason's Mounds were completely isolated by them ; and the only way they could be supplied with food, stores and munitions was by river after dark. Fortunately this was accomplished without detection by the enemy.

The 8th April was mainly spent in reconnaissance, registration, wire cutting and other preparations for next morning's assault, although the British artillery and the 8th Brigade machine guns maintained an intermittent fire on the enemy's position.

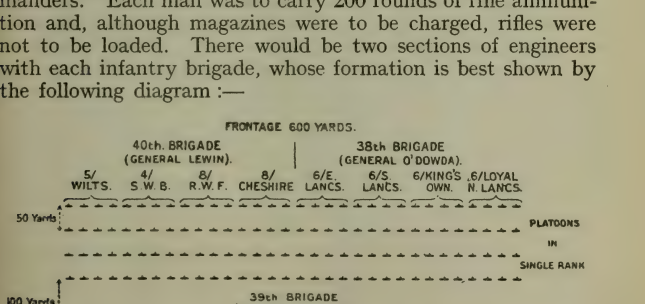
At 3 p.m. General Gorringe issued his operation order. After dark the 13th Division were to replace the 7th Division in their trenches, forming up on the frontage of six hundred yards on which they were to assault, with their left six hundred yards from the Tigris, while on their right the 7th Division were to concentrate between the 13th Division and the marsh on a frontage of two hundred yards.* The 13th Division were to

* The effective strength of the 13th Division infantry taking part in this attack amounted to 234 officers and 7,120 other ranks ; while the rifle strength of the 7th Division was only 3,250.

advance so as to reach the enemy's first line at 4.45 a.m. on the 9th and were then to press on and capture the second and third lines, consolidating as they went and also clearing the trenches on either flank by bombing. Should an outburst of fire from the enemy's trenches take place after 4.45 a.m. the 7th Division were to direct the fire of their machine guns, but not rifles, on to the trenches on the Turkish left, taking care not to fire on the flanks of the 13th Division. The left bank artillery were placed under the orders of General Maude to be ready at 4.45 a.m. to fire on the trenches on either flank of his attack; and when they opened fire, the right bank artillery would bombard the Turkish trenches beyond the attack, engage any Turkish batteries in action and prevent the enemy reinforcing his fourth line, while the 3rd Division machine guns would maintain an enfilading fire on various parts of the Turkish position. The Senior Naval Officer was asked to hold his flotilla in readiness to co-operate.

The 3rd Division operation order, in addition to instructions in regard to co-operation with the assault, laid down the steps that were to be taken in the event of a Turkish counter-attack along the right bank; and the 7th Division ordered its two other infantry brigades to form up behind the 28th.

The 13th Divisional order entered into considerable detail, and was issued after a conference with its three brigade commanders. Each man was to carry 200 rounds of rifle ammunition and, although magazines were to be charged, rifles were not to be loaded. There would be two sections of engineers with each infantry brigade, whose formation is best shown by the following diagram :—



(NOTE. 39th BRIGADE was still short of one battalion)

The distance to be traversed to the enemy's first line was about 650 yards; and the brigades were to commence their advance at 4.20 a.m. in quick time, breaking into a double when within charging distance of the hostile line. The two leading lines of the 38th and 40th Brigades were to capture the enemy's first line trench, the third and fourth lines of these brigades to capture the second line trench and the 39th Brigade was to take the third line trench. An artillery *liaison* officer would accompany each of the two leading brigades.

There was moonlight for the first part of the night, but then and afterwards there was almost a complete absence of firing on either side; and the concentration of the infantry proceeded without difficulty, being completed between 2.30 and 3 a.m. In spite of their losses in the recent fighting, officers and men of the 13th Division were, it is said, confident of their ability to achieve the task before them; but it was a very cold night, the men had a long wait in recumbent positions in attack formation and by the time they advanced they were much benumbed.

At 4.20 a.m. the three brigades moved off silently and punctually and covered the first three or four hundred yards more quickly and easily than had been anticipated. The advance, however, had been detected by the enemy's patrols, and at this stage a red flare went up from the left of the Turkish trenches. This seemed to stagger the men still stiff with cold and, though the first line went on in good style, the second line faltered and got mixed up with the third line, which with the remaining lines pressed on. At the same time, the left of the line inclined towards the flare, i.e., to their right. Almost immediately afterwards came a second flare (green) from the right of the Turkish line and a heavy burst of gun, machine gun and rifle fire. The second flare caused the right of the line to incline to their left and although, according to General Maude, most of the enemy fire went high in the dark, a part of the second line hesitated and finally fell back in spite of its officers' strenuous efforts to rally it, carrying part of several other lines with it. The first line meanwhile had kept steadily on and with great gallantry such of them as survived the heavy enemy fire, now assisted in its direction by blue flares along the whole Turkish front, effected a successful footing in the Turkish front line, where they were shortly joined by some portions of the rearward lines of the 6th Loyal North Lancashire, 6th King's Own, 8th Royal Welch Fusiliers and 5th Wiltshire, who had steadfastly maintained their advance. But the

mass of the 38th and 40th Brigades were in such a state of confusion and disorganisation that the 9th Worcestershire and 9th Royal Warwickshire of the 39th Brigade also became involved, being carried away by part of the lines in front of them. The officers did all they could to rally and lead their men forward, but, in spite of many individual cases of great personal gallantry, they failed to reorganise the mass sufficiently to admit of a sustained advance under the hostile fire, which as it got light became so deadly as to render advance impossible. The 7th North Staffordshire of the 39th Brigade managed to avoid the confusion in front of them and, steadfastly maintaining their advance, some of their platoons succeeded in establishing themselves close to the Turkish line.*

The Turks, meanwhile, driven out of their front line trench by the gallant first line of the 38th and 40th Brigades, had fallen back to their second line trench. This was to have been taken by the third and fourth lines of the 38th and 40th Brigades, and their failure to get forward in sufficient strength enabled the Turkish officers to rally their men and start them in a bombing attack against the British invaders. These gallantly held their own until their bombs gave out, when their shattered remnants were driven out by an enemy advance and fell back to a line some four hundred yards off, where they dug themselves in. Halil Pasha admitted subsequently to General Townshend that this assault of the 13th Division had only failed through lack of support.†

Till 6 a.m. 13th Division headquarters could get no definite news of what had happened, but the Turks seemed to be retiring and General Gorringe, under the impression from their reports that the trenches had been captured, sent orders at 6.15 to the 7th Division to get ready to move forward in pursuit on receipt of further orders. There was still uncertainty until 7.30 a.m., when General Gorringe received a message sent about 7 a.m. by General Maude which showed that the attack had apparently failed; and at 8.45 a report reached Corps headquarters giving the true state of affairs.

By this time the men of the 13th Division had been rallied and somewhat reorganised; and during the day they consolidated the line some four hundred yards short of the Turkish

* The accounts of this attack are, naturally, confused and very difficult to follow; most of the gallant men who penetrated the Turkish trenches did not emerge alive; and it may be that this narrative does not do full justice to some of the units engaged.

† "My Campaign in Mesopotamia," by General Townshend.

front line. The Turks made frequent attempts to shell them out of this, but these were all successfully countered by the supporting British artillery and machine guns, especially by those of the 8th Infantry Brigade on the right bank.

In this attack the 13th Division sustained 1,807 casualties, to which the 6th King's Own, 6th Loyal North Lancashire, 5th Wiltshire and 8th Royal Welch Fusiliers each contributed over 26 per cent. of their respective strengths.

Panic, such as apparently seized some of the men, rendering a great part of the division temporarily impotent by the disorganisation it created, is one of the hazards of a night attack of which history gives several instances among the very best troops. In this particular case officers of experience who were present attribute it to the benumbed state of the men, to the shortage of officers* and trained non-commissioned officers with platoons and sections and to the limited military training and experience of a large portion of the division, who had shown that they did not lack courage.

On the right bank, during the day, serious trouble was caused by the bursting of an embankment and causeway freshly constructed eastward of Abu Rumman, through which the Tigris flood passed, spreading as far as the Umm al Baram and adding to the already extensive inundations. Besides isolating further portions of the 3rd Division and several batteries of artillery, these floods prevented further operations along this bank and added greatly to General Gorringe's anxieties by increasing the difficulty of supplying the advanced troops there.

During the night of the 9th/10th April, the 38th and 39th Brigades were withdrawn ; and our trenches on the left bank, manned by the 7th Division, 40th Brigade, 72nd and 88th Field Companies, R.E., and 8th Welch Pioneers, were being pushed forward 150 yards, when the waters of the Tigris and the Suwaikiya began to encroach again on both flanks, necessitating a suspension of the work to prevent complete inundation.

The weather was now becoming very hot in the daytime. and the glare of the sunlight, with dust outside the inundated areas, was very trying ; and, in addition, all suffered greatly from the plague of flies, mosquitoes and sandflies. A Member of Parliament, who was in Mesopotamia at this period, describes in " Mons, Anzac and Kut " his experience of the flies :— " Nothing that I have ever seen or dreamed of came up to

* Forty per cent. had been killed or wounded in the fighting at Hanna and Fallahiya.

the flies. They hatched out until they were almost the air. They were in myriads. The horses were half mad. The flies were mostly tiny. They rolled up in little balls when one passed one's hand across one's sweating face. They were on your eyelids and lashes and in your lips and nostrils. We could not speak for them and could hardly see."

General Lake, who had been in close touch with General Gorringe throughout the operations, now had a personal discussion with him on the very serious situation. The capture of the Sannaiyat position offered great tactical advantages, owing to the considerable extension of front which its possession by us would impose on the Turks and which would make our greater facilities for transferring forces from one bank of the river to the other of additional advantage, even though it had not yet been found possible to construct the second bridge at Fallahiya.* Before, however, another assault on Sannaiyat could be attempted with good chances of success, it would evidently be necessary to approach it by sapping and this involved delay ;† whereas the time at General Gorringe's disposal was very short if Kut was to be reached before starvation forced its surrender. After full consideration of the different alternatives, General Lake came to the conclusion that an attack against the enemy's right offered speedier prospects of relief ; and General Gorringe accordingly began to make arrangements for this.

On the 10th April General Lake informed General Townshend that it was distinctly doubtful if Kut could be relieved by the 15th and asked if it were possible to increase the garrison's time limit of resistance. General Townshend thereupon further reduced his already scanty scale of rations and reported that in consequence he would be able to hold out until the 21st April. General Lake then made arrangements for the Air Force to drop a certain amount of food supplies into Kut ; and on the 14th General Townshend reported that he could hold out till the 29th April as the extreme limit, but that after the 23rd, except for meat, he would be entirely dependent on food dropped by aeroplanes.

It has been shown in previous chapters how difficult it had been for the authorities in India with their depleted and

* It was estimated at this time that it would take from seven to eight days to move the boat bridge from Wadi and construct it at Fallahiya owing to the strong current of the river.

† General Gorringe estimated that it would take four days to sap forward 100 yards, and this time, including two night advances of 150 yards each, would be required to cover the intervening space.

insufficient resources to maintain the force in Mesopotamia, and how they had been hampered in carrying this out by the requirements of the defence of their own North-West Frontier. In consequence, the assumption by the War Office of the control of the operations in Mesopotamia with its attendant responsibilities for the supply of reinforcements and warlike stores, as well as the fact that two divisions in Egypt had been earmarked, in case of serious trouble, to reinforce India, had afforded great relief to the authorities there. The Commander-in-Chief in India still had certain responsibilities, which have been mentioned, in regard to Mesopotamia, but Lord Hardinge and he were now able to devote more time and attention to the defence of India.*

A perusal of the private correspondence between Lord Hardinge and Mr. Chamberlain, which has frequently been quoted in these pages, shows the difference in this respect after the beginning of March and until the beginning of April, when Lord Hardinge handed over the office of Viceroy to Lord Chelmsford. One point, however, deserves mention. On the 27th March Mr. Chamberlain telegraphed privately to Lord Hardinge, saying that reports which had reached him of the lack of organisation at the Bombay base had profoundly disturbed him, and enquiring if the Commander-in-Chief or any high officer in his confidence had yet visited Bombay. In reply, on the 30th, Lord Hardinge said that the situation on the frontier and elsewhere had been far too critical for him to have allowed the Commander-in-Chief to leave headquarters when rapid and decisive action might have been necessary at any time; and that consequently Sir Beauchamp Duff had not himself visited Bombay. But the Adjutant-General, Quartermaster-General, Director of Supply and Transport and Director of Medical Services had all, on different dates, been to Bombay to inspect and report on the base arrangements there. In South Persia the Germans were said to be losing ground by their ill-behaviour and there were great hopes that Sir Percy Sykes would be able to effect an improvement in the situation there.

* By this time the War Office had been also able to place a few aeroplanes at the disposal of the Government of India for use on the frontier, and the Afghans and tribesmen were much impressed by these.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LAST ATTEMPT AT RELIEF; BAIT ISA AND SANNAIYAT.

(MAPS 19 AND 20.)

GENERAL GORRINGE now proceeded to consider the steps necessary to carry into effect General Lake's decision that the next attempt should be made on the right bank of the Tigris. The existing inundations there already made all movement sufficiently difficult, and it seemed probable that, from their controlling positions on the river bank upstream, the Turks could increase the extent of these considerably. Consequently great care would have to be taken, not only in the arrangements for the advance itself, but also in precautions to obviate any attacking force being isolated at a critical moment by floods let loose in its rear; and this last factor would, owing to the existence of the Umm al Baram, particularly affect all turning movements. A wide turning operation south of the Umm al Baram was prohibited by the distance that would have to be traversed; and in this connection it must be borne in mind that General Gorringe had been prevented, as already mentioned,* from forming an advanced supply depot along this route by the failure of the 13th Division transport to reach the front. Moreover, owing to the floods having closed the roads from Shaikh Saad and Amara, he had now only about five days' supplies in hand at the front.

On the morning of the 10th April, the forward line of the 3rd Division (8th, 37th and 7th Brigades in this order from the right), about a mile and a half west of Abu Rumman, extended roughly southward from the Tigris for over three miles. In front of their right, an inundation some hundreds of yards wide, which appeared to emanate from Bait Isa, prevented any sapping forward; to their left, further inundations extended towards the Umm al Baram; and to their rear, flood conditions so impeded traffic that supplies and munitions had to be sent up to the front, for part of the way, by river after dark. There was a sheet of water, five hundred yards wide, extending from the Tigris between Abu Rumman and Mason's Mounds almost to the Umm al Baram; and though the extensive floods between Mason's Mounds and the Fallahiya bridge had been spanned by the evening of the 9th April by a practicable causeway, the breaching of an embankment north of Mason's Mounds on the 10th had caused considerable damage and

* See page 368, footnote.

further delay. For some time past the sappers and pioneers of the Tigris Corps had been engaged continuously in combating the effect of the floods, mainly by the construction of miles of embankments and causeways, and had often been obliged to call on the advanced brigades to assist them at short notice with strong working parties. In fact, since the middle of March, no part of the force had been free of the necessity for taking part in the fight against the waters; and it will be seen that this weary struggle had to be persisted in and endured throughout the whole course of the ensuing operations.

The first step taken by General Gorringe was to issue orders that the work on embankments and causeways in the neighbourhood of Abu Rumman was to be expedited; and he held a personal discussion on the situation with General Keary at Mason's Mounds on the morning of the 10th. That day, reconnaissance by the 7th Brigade indicated that the enemy's forward positions at Bait Isa could best be approached from the south-eastward; and during the afternoon two companies of the 89th Punjabis were sent forward about three-quarters of a mile by General Egerton, commanding 7th Brigade, to occupy the position subsequently known as Rohde's Piquet.* During the ensuing night, reconnaissances by the 8th and 37th Brigades elicited the fact that, in spite of the floods which seemed to surround them, the Turks still held a forward piquet line about half-way between Bait Isa and the British front line.

On the left bank of the Tigris, meanwhile, little change had taken place in the British dispositions, as flood encroachments had interfered considerably with the work of sapping forward.

On the 11th April there was little fighting on the right bank; but patrols from the 7th Brigade, pushing forward through floods to the north-westward of Rohde's Piquet, managed to reach within six hundred yards of the enemy trenches near Twin Pimples and reported them to be strongly held.

At 2 p.m. General Gorringe issued his operation order. He intended "to operate on the right bank and to force the enemy's Sinn position while containing the enemy in his present Sannaiyat position and in front of Bait Isa with the 7th Division."† To give effect to this, the following operations and

* After Lieutenant Rohde, 89th Punjabis. He was killed in that vicinity on the 12th April.

† At the same time, to deceive the enemy, General Gorringe circulated news that his reason for advancing on Bait Isa was to gain a position whence his guns could take the Sannaiyat position in reverse.

movements were ordered. On the morning of the 12th April the 3rd Division would seize their first objective, the enemy's forward piquet line in front of Bait Isa. The 35th Infantry Brigade from Fallahiya and the 44th Battery, R.F.A., were to move at once (i.e., 12th) to the vicinity of Twin Canals to protect the left rear of the 3rd Division, thus enabling the 9th Infantry Brigade and other troops to rejoin the 3rd Division for the attack; the 7th Division would that night take over the trenches on the left bank occupied by the 40th Brigade, which would then rejoin the 13th Division at Fallahiya; and the 13th Division, after taking over protective duties at Fallahiya camp, would hold two brigades and divisional troops in readiness to move after dark on the 12th to the Turkish line to be captured by the 3rd Division that morning. After consolidating this line, the 3rd Division were to seize by the morning of the 13th some Turkish trenches lying eastward of Sinn Abtar redoubt, which had originally been constructed by the British on the 8th/9th March during and after the attack on Dujaila. The 6th Cavalry Brigade and 36th Infantry Brigade, between Senna canal and Wadi, were to be ready to concentrate north-east of the Pools of Siloam by daylight on the 13th.*

During the 11th April it appeared that the Turks at Bait Isa were widening the breach in the Tigris embankment and thus increasing the inundations in front of the British. It was, therefore, decided to endeavour on the 12th to obtain command of this embankment.

That night General Lake sent the following telegram to India and London :—

> ". . . . Gorringe has come to the conclusion that the capture of Sannaiyat must be a matter of several days owing to the water-logged condition of the ground in front of the position and to the moonlight nights, which necessitate approach chiefly by saps. Fresh continuous lines of trenches and communications between Sannaiyat and Sinn left bank are reported by air reconnaissance to be under construction. Since the time available is short, we have decided that he shall make an attempt to break through Sinn right bank and preliminary operations begin on the morning of the 12th. On both banks the floods

* On the 11th April some artillery transfers were also ordered between the 7th and 13th Divisions. The 9th Brigade, R.F.A., were attached to the 13th Division, while three batteries of the 66th Brigade, R.F.A., the 72nd and 77th Howitzer Batteries and the two guns of the 1/104th Heavy Battery were attached to the 7th Division.

are on the increase. Movements may be delayed by hurricane and torrents of rain which are prevailing at time of report, 9.15 p.m."

At 4 p.m. General Keary had issued orders for the attack next morning to be carried out by the 7th and 9th Brigades. The enemy line to be captured ran southward from the Tigris, roughly parallel to, and about eighteen hundred yards from, the British line, and rather less than that distance from the main Bait Isa position. Of the 71 guns* placed at General Keary's disposal, 32 would support the attack, 25 would direct their fire against Sannaiyat and enemy guns on the left bank, four (1/1st Sussex) would be in observation to cover the left flank, four (23rd Mountain) would be held in readiness near Abu Rumman to act as required, and six (4th Brigade, R.F.A.) were unable to come into action owing to the floods.

Heavy rain began to fall, however, at 8.30 p.m., and in about an hour the ground everywhere was covered by at least two inches of water, making movement impossible. Thus, once again, the British plans were brought to naught by the bad weather; and at 9.50 p.m. General Gorringe had no option but to issue an order postponing operations for twenty-four hours.

The morning of the 12th April was fine and the ground began to dry up rapidly. Taking advantage of this, General Keary, who had cancelled his order of the previous day, issued instructions at 9.45 a.m. to the 8th and 37th Brigades that they were to move forward and, pushing back enemy snipers and piquets, were to establish a new piquet line as far westward as possible. On the left of the 37th Brigade, the 7th Brigade, whose advanced piquets (89th Punjabis) were on the low sandhills known as Rohde's Piquet, were to conform with this forward movement. At 11 a.m. a message from General Gorringe reached General Keary asking him to consider whether he could make good the day lost by pushing forward after dark to seize and consolidate the first objective. General Keary had by this time cancelled his previous order owing to the depth of water found in front of the 37th Brigade; but in view of General Gorringe's message he decided, after discussion with his brigadiers, to push forward in the afternoon.

Advancing at 3.30 p.m., the 8th Brigade had by 4 p.m. driven in the line of outlying posts in front of the Turkish

* 2/86th and 2/104th (60-pounders) = 8; 69th Brigade, R.F.A. (less one battery) = 12; 60th and 61st Howitzer = 12; 13th Brigade, R.F.A. (less one battery) = 12; 4th Brigade, R.F.A. = 18; 1/1st Sussex = 4; 23rd Mountain = 4; and one 6-inch howitzer. Total 71.

advanced line, but in face of heavy enemy fire from both banks could make little further progress through the floods; and at 5.45 p.m. the construction of a new line of trenches was begun. Owing to the configuration of the inundations this line was somewhat irregular, but by 10 p.m., when the line had been to some extent adjusted, the brigade held positions some 1,200 to 1,500 yards westward of their former line.

The 37th Brigade had moved forward at the same time and, after crossing water well above their knees, half the leading battalion (1/4th Somerset) pushed on under fairly heavy fire until within two to three hundred yards of the Turkish trenches at Twin Pimples. Here they were beyond artillery support, and the three companies 36th Sikhs on their left had been checked some five hundred yards to the rear by heavy enemy fire. All communication with their supports had broken down and further progress was impossible. Two supporting companies joined them after dark, and, after learning the position of the 8th Brigade line, they all withdrew somewhat to join up with this line on their right. By 3.30 a.m. the 37th Brigade held a somewhat irregular line, with their left advanced, at a distance varying from 1,500 to 2,500 yards westward of their former trenches.

General Egerton, commanding 7th Brigade, learning from his detachment at Rohde's Piquet that the Turks were falling back before the 37th Brigade, had ordered the 89th Punjabis at 4.15 p.m. to advance; and he followed them himself with the 27th Punjabis to Rohde's Piquet. On arrival there he found that the 89th had advanced about twelve hundred yards further and were closely engaged with Turkish trenches south of Twin Pimples; and during the evening he supported them with companies of the 27th Punjabis, Connaughts and 128th Pioneers. Fighting of a desultory nature continued for a great part of the night and, touch having been established with the 37th Brigade, a new line of trenches was established, some 2,500 to 3,000 yards westward of the trenches the brigade had started from, thus forming a somewhat prominent salient to the rest of the line held by the 3rd Division.

The 9th Brigade had during the evening been moved up to support the 8th and 37th Brigades but had not been engaged with the enemy.

The British casualties on the 12th April amounted to well over 400, including 24 British and Indian officers. To this number the 36th Sikhs contributed 195 and the 89th Punjabis 121—this last number out of an effective strength of 429.

On the left bank of the river a north-easterly gale, blowing from 4.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. on the 12th, drove the water of the Suwaikiya marsh in large waves right over the protective embankments and flooded all the northern fire-trenches and the most northerly communication trench of the 7th Division. The British garrisons had to evacuate them hastily under heavy enemy fire, and although they had to abandon their tools, blankets and kits, they managed to retrieve their machine guns and rifles. They took up fresh positions behind the parados of the flooded trenches and soon had an opportunity of causing losses to the Turks, also in their turn flooded out of the trenches on their left.

On the right bank the passage of the 9th Brigade to support the front lines of the 3rd Division had so cut up the surface of the causeway as to render it impracticable for the time being for further traffic. The gale of the previous evening had, moreover, driven the river flood with such force at the embankments on the right bank that considerable damage had been caused and heavy repair work was found necessary throughout the 13th April by the sappers and pioneers of the 13th Division, assisted by the 36th Infantry Brigade brought up from Wadi. Further, reconnaissance showed that the ground leading to the area about and southward of Rohde's Piquet was too much inundated by floods, emanating from Bait Isa, to admit of the advance of artillery over it.

On the left bank the marsh had receded somewhat with the cessation of the wind, but the trenches remained flooded and new ones had to be constructed. The enemy were also seen to be hard at work from the same cause, and during the day the activity of working parties on both sides gave rise to a good deal of firing.

During the morning of the 13th April some readjustment was made in the new front line occupied by the 3rd Division, and, owing to a report that Turks were advancing from the Dujaila redoubt direction, General Egerton ordered piquets from the 128th Pioneers to occupy empty trenches at the Triangle.

At midday General Gorringe, whose headquarters were by now established on the right bank near Fallahiya, informed General Keary that it had been ascertained that the floods between Bait Isa and the Umm al Baram were caused by the Turks at Bait Isa, which it was consequently imperative to capture before moving against the trenches to the southward, i.e., the second objective given in General Gorringe's operation

order of the 11th. General Keary was, therefore, to order further reconnaissances with a view to capturing Bait Isa.

These orders were issued by General Keary soon after. The 7th Brigade were to reconnoitre the Turkish trenches at Twin Pimples and to prepare to push forward during the night and dig themselves in close to these trenches ; and the 9th Brigade were to move forward before dark to support the 7th Brigade. General Keary amplified these orders after dark, announcing that the attack was to be made early on the 15th April ; but he ended his message by saying that General Gorringe had sent word that if reconnaissance showed that the Turkish trenches were not held in strength, they were to be rushed without artillery support that night (13th/14th) so as to make up for the time which had been lost. General Egerton, commanding 7th Brigade, replied two or three hours later that the 89th Punjabis, whose piquets were only seventy-five yards from those of the Turks, had been told to clear up the situation ; but that his own impression was that the enemy were in too great strength to justify an immediate assault. General Keary, hearing at the same time that piquets of the 128th had occupied the Triangle, ordered their withdrawal and told General Egerton to do what was possible to carry out General Gorringe's wishes. The 128th were withdrawn, but General Egerton did not consider it advisable to attempt the assault. During the night the 38th Brigade of the 13th Division moved to Abu Rumman to support the 3rd Division.

At 9 p.m. the British artillery on the left bank started a bombardment to lead the Turks to believe that an assault was about to be made on Sannaiyat, but this evoked little reply ; and it seemed as if the Turks were only holding their front line lightly and were relying on outlying piquets and flares to give them due warning of any attack.

By the morning of the 14th April the British artillery on the right bank had been brought up behind the 3rd Division line to support the further advance ; but attempts to register the guns failed, as aeroplanes could not fly owing to a south-westerly gale. This gale also had the effect of driving the waters of the Suwaikiya marsh northward for nearly three-quarters of a mile. Reconnaissance by the 7th Brigade during the night showed that the trenches about the Triangle were still not held by the enemy, and during the morning part of them were occupied by the 128th Pioneers. A report by the 89th Punjabis said that the enemy's trenches near Twin Pimples appeared to be continuous, but that the southern

portion of them were obscured by scrub, although they appeared to be only lightly held. At this part of the line the Turkish and British trenches were about four hundred yards apart, though their piquets were only about seventy-five yards from each other. A great part of the ground on the right bank dried up during the day, and work on embankments and causeways was pushed on with all speed.

It has already been mentioned how General Lake's scheme for re-victualling Kut by sending a steamer to try and run the gauntlet of the Turkish positions at night had been rejected.* General Lake, however, was not altogether satisfied that the idea was impracticable and he took the opportunity of a visit of inspection by Vice-Admiral Sir R. Wemyss,† who arrived at the front on the 12th April, to discuss the question with him. General Lake felt that the recent failures in the operations had been due rather to bad weather and floods than to the fighting powers of the Turks; and he was, therefore, of opinion that if he could gain more time for necessary preparations, future attacks would stand a better chance of effecting the relief of Kut. At this time floods had rendered the road from Amara to the front quite impassable by troops marching; all the available steamers were required to bring up supplies, stores and ammunition for the troops already at the front; and, in consequence, some reinforcements at Amara could not be got up to join General Gorringe to replace his casualties. Moreover, the extent and nature of the floods had made it evident that, for any attack under these conditions, time for necessary preparation was essential if success was to be ensured.

Admiral Wemyss at once went into the question. On the 13th he informed General Lake that he considered the chances of success to be so small that, though he was prepared to undertake the attempt as a last resource, he wished to be assured that it would, if successful, add definitely to the chances of relief. Otherwise, he did not consider it fair to call for volunteers for the attempt, although he knew that he would get them. General Lake gave him the required assurance and asked him to select from the river steamers the one which he considered most suitable for the purpose. The *Julnar* was selected; and on the 14th orders were issued for arrangements to be made as secretly and expeditiously as possible to prepare her for the attempt which the navy would make if other means failed to effect the relief.

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* See page 361.

† Commander-in-Chief, East Indies Squadron.

On the evening of the 14th April, General Gorringe issued orders for the 3rd Division to carry out the attack on the enemy's trenches about Twin Pimples at dawn next morning. The 38th Brigade would come under General Keary's orders, to support the 3rd Division, while the 36th Brigade would be held in readiness at Fallahiya to move forward at 8 a.m. General Keary, who had already discussed the attack with General Egerton and Colonel Campbell, commanding the 7th and 9th Brigades respectively, issued his orders for the attack at 9 p.m. The objective was eight hundred yards length of a trench which ran roughly southward from the vicinity of Twin Pimples and was a few hundred yards in advance of the right of the main Bait Isa position. This trench, which was reported to be held by the enemy in some strength, was said to be about four hundred yards distant from the line held by the 89th Punjabis, though enemy piquets were within seventy-five yards of those of the British. The troops were warned in the order, however, that the location of the enemy's line could not be considered accurate. The attack was to be made by the 7th and 9th Brigades advancing side by side under mutual arrangements by their brigadiers. The 8th and 37th Brigades were to remain in their present line* and were to open with machine gun and rifle fire as soon as they could see, so as to hold the enemy in their front; and the artillery, also opening fire as soon as they could see, were to bombard the trench to be captured and also to put down a barrage in front of the main Bait Isa position. The divisional cavalry were to watch the front between the 128th position at the Triangle and the Umm al Baram; and the 38th Brigade, moving to a position half a mile south-east of Rohde's Piquet, was to form Divisional Reserve.

As mentioned before, the position of the left of the 3rd Division, being further forward than the rest of the line, formed a pronounced bastion extending from the vicinity of a point about one and a quarter miles south of the Tigris christened "The Narrows." During the attack the greater part of the northerly face of this bastion was to be held by the left of the 37th Brigade, while the western face, about four hundred yards from the Turkish trench south of Twin Pimples, was to be held by the 89th Punjabis and 93rd Infantry (7th and 9th Brigades) to cover the deployment of the attacking infantry. Behind them, on an alignment some fifteen hundred yards

* The 37th Brigade were, however, to extend their left somewhat to take over part of the trenches on the right of the 7th Brigade.

from the trench to be captured, four battalions (Connaught Rangers and 27th Punjabis of 7th Brigade and Highland Light Infantry and 1/9th Gurkhas of 9th Brigade) were to form up by 3 a.m. with fifty yards interval between brigades.

The night was dark and cloudy, and just before 3 a.m. on the 15th April a violent thunderstorm broke with heavy rain, which made it difficult for the troops to gain their positions; and this resulted in a greater interval being left between brigades than had been ordered. Rain continued to fall till about 8 a.m., though it became less heavy after the first hour, but the darkness was intense.

"When the advance commenced at 4.45 a.m. on a compass bearing of 280°, the two battalions of the 9th Brigade were ordered to incline to their right to correct the interval between them and the 7th Brigade on their right. Each of the 9th Brigade battalions had half a battalion in first and half a battalion in second line; while the 7th Brigade had the whole of the Connaughts in their first line and the 27th Punjabis in second line. Each brigade was under the independent command of its brigadier. In the darkness the leading half battalion of the Highland Light Infantry inclined too far to the right and got in front of the 1/9th Gurkhas. Further, the lightning and the men's fixed bayonets so affected the compasses carried by the guides that the greater part of the Highland Light Infantry, 1/9th Gurkhas and Connaught Rangers lost their direction and found themselves on the northerly face of the salient among the 37th Brigade. Fortunately, however, a party of about 260 men of these three battalions under an officer of the Connaughts found their way to the enemy trench near Twin Pimples and captured the northern portion of it without much difficulty; and as it became light some parties of the 27th Punjabis, who in accordance with their orders had halted in the piquet line of the 89th, pushed forward and captured the southern portion, also without much difficulty. In spite of heavy enemy fire from Bait Isa and a weak enemy counter-attack at about 11 a.m., the position was then consolidated. General Keary, hearing of its capture, issued orders that the 9th Brigade were to take over its occupation after dark, while the 7th Brigade were to connect it with the position held by the 38th Brigade southward of Rohde's Piquet; and the 14th Field and 23rd Mountain Batteries were brought forward, to near the Narrows and westward of Rohde's Piquet respectively, to support the 7th and 9th Brigades.

The 8th and 37th Brigades had, meanwhile, opened fire at daybreak,* drawing a vigorous response from the Turks in their main position; and at about 8 a.m. General Keary ordered the 37th Brigade to make good the area between Twin Pimples and the left of the 8th Brigade and connect the two. This, however, could not be carried out at once owing to heavy enemy fire, and before it was done the 8th Brigade had made a further advance. Patrols of the Manchesters had reported that the enemy trench about half a mile to their front, and separated from them by water knee-deep or by thick mud, was only held by enemy piquets; and at 1.30 p.m. the 8th Brigade commander (General Edwardes), coming to the conclusion that its capture was possible, ordered the 47th Sikhs, Manchesters and 59th Rifles each to push forward strong patrols, and, if they could do so without committing themselves to an engagement, drive back the enemy piquets and occupy the trench. The advance of these patrols was well and vigorously carried out and the Turkish piquets evacuated the trench, leaving forty-three prisoners in the hands of the British. Soon after this the 37th Brigade moved forward and joined up the Twin Pimples trench with the left of the new 8th Brigade line. One of the first steps that our troops had to take in consolidating this new line was the construction of various embankments to keep the trenches from being flooded.

In the evening General Keary received instructions from Corps headquarters that at dusk next day a brigade of the 13th Division would relieve the 8th and 37th Brigades and that General Keary was to arrange to assault and capture the main Bait Isa position at dawn on the 17th;† the 13th Division would then take this over and the 3rd Division would proceed to capture the trenches made by the British eastward of Sinn Abtar on the 8th/9th March.

On the 15th April the dispositions of the troops of the Tigris Corps not under General Keary's orders were as follows: On the left bank the 7th Division, supported by 44 guns,‡ were slowly and gradually sapping forward; and near Fallahiya bridge were the 13th Division headquarters with the 39th and 40th Brigades and also the 12th Sapper Company (less one section). General Gorringe's headquarters were on the right

* Sunrise was about 5.30 a.m.

† General Gorringe estimated that the Turkish 35th Division and one regiment of the 2nd Division were holding the Es Sinn right bank position and the position at Bait Isa.

‡ 9th Brigade, R.F.A. = 18; 72 and 77th Batteries = 8; 66th Brigade, R.F.A. (less one section) = 14; D/69th Battery = 4.

bank near the bridge and just below it were the gunboats *Mantis*, *Mayfly*, *Sawfly* and *Stonefly*, as well as *Flycatcher*. Between the bridge and Abu Rumman were the 36th Infantry Brigade, 13th Sapper Company, 72nd and 88th Engineer Companies and the technical troops of the 3rd Division (20th and 21st Sapper Companies and 34th Pioneers), all being employed on preventive measures against the floods and on road making, especially on the causeway between Mason's Mounds and Abu Rumman; this was still so incomplete that guns, supplies and stores between these two places had to proceed by river after dark. One of the field batteries of the 4th Brigade was also in this vicinity. The 35th Infantry Brigade and a battery of the 13th Brigade, R.F.A., were at Twin Canals, with the Cavalry Brigade between them and the Tigris. At the Wadi camp were the 16th Cavalry (less one troop), 1/3rd Sussex Battery, a 12-pounder gun, Nos. 1 and 2 Bridging Trains, a company 12th Pioneers and the headquarters of the 41st Infantry Brigade with the 45th Sikhs, 2/4th Gurkhas and 1/8th Gurkhas;* and the gunboat *Grayfly* was also stationed here. At Shaikh Saad were a troop 16th Cavalry, a section C/66th Battery, R.F.A., a 15-pounder post gun, the 1/4th Devonshire of the 41st Brigade, 64th Pioneers, (37th Brigade), 3rd Brahmans (less one company), and a company 67th Punjabis.

During the night 15th/16th April the remainder of General Keary's 62 field and mountain guns† moved forward to give close artillery support in the coming attack; and at dawn on the 16th the 47th Sikhs skilfully effected the capture of the last Turkish advanced post, which guarded the canal by which they had flooded a great part of the area. There now remained no outlying Turkish detachments between the British line and the main Bait Isa position six hundred to nine hundred yards distant. This position ran south-south-east from the Tigris for about half a mile and then forming a blunt salient bent backward in a south-westerly direction and joined the Chahela trenches.

The operations from the 12th to the 15th April had been a considerable strain on the men of the 3rd Division. Though their total casualties, including those on the 12th already

* The 41st Brigade (General Cadell) had been coming up gradually from Basra.

† The 44th Battery, R.F.A. (13th Brigade) moved up to the front from Twin Canals, where its place was taken by the 7th Battery, R.F.A. (4th Brigade). The eight 60-pounders and the 6-inch howitzer remained in position near Mason's Mounds.

mentioned, had only amounted to 615, the flood and bad weather conditions, combined with the fact that they had frequently been short of rations,* had rendered the operations unusually trying ; and it was held that the troops had made good progress with considerable skill. None the less, the delay in getting forward caused considerable anxiety, and on the 16th, telegraphing to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Lake intimated that it would be a near thing but that he hoped to effect the relief before the rations in Kut gave out.

During the 16th April preparations were made for next day's attack. At noon, after a personal discussion with General Gorringe, who had come to his divisional headquarters,† General Keary met his subordinate commanders and explained his intentions. The main object of the attack was to gain possession of a series of six canals lying to the west of Bait Isa ruins ; and, owing to the inundations in the northern area, it had been decided to deliver the assault against a part of the Turkish line immediately southward of the blunt salient.‡

A canal extending from the Tigris through the Turkish position and passing south of Twin Pimples would direct the left of the attacking force and a parallel canal about seven hundred yards north would similarly direct the right. The front line hitherto held by the 8th and 37th Brigades as far south as this latter canal would be taken over that evening by the 39th Brigade (13th Division), while the front between the two canals would be taken over by the 7th Brigade. The 8th Brigade, thus relieved, would take over as quickly as possible the trenches held by the remainder of the 7th and 9th Brigades, who would then, each accompanied by a sapper "blocking" detachment (from 20th and 21st Sapper Companies) assemble between the two canals to make the assault and the 37th Brigade would be in reserve behind them. Thus the 8th Brigade would hold a frontage of over two thousand yards running southward from a point near Twin Pimples,§ with an outlying detachment, some twelve hundred yards still further south, at the Triangle ; and the Divisional Cavalry (two squadrons 33rd Cavalry) would watch the front Triangle—Umm al Baram, while the 38th Brigade (13th Division), still under General Keary's orders, would form divisional reserve, concentrating a short distance east of Rohde's Piquet.

* Because of the difficulty of getting supplies forward to the advanced positions.
† A mile south of Abu Rumman.
‡ The portion of the trench to be assaulted is marked AZ on Map 20.
§ Marked X on Map 20.

The artillery would begin to register their guns at 6.20 a.m. and would open an intense twenty-five minute bombardment at 6.45 a.m. on the whole Turkish front from the Tigris to a point marked E on Map 20. During this bombardment the 7th and 9th Brigades, in this order from the right, would advance as near as possible to the Turkish line AZ, which they would assault at 7.10 a.m. At 6.15 a.m. the 37th Brigade would move towards the Narrows to be in a position whence they could support the 7th and 9th Brigades.

After AZ had been captured, the 7th Brigade would clear the Turkish front line up to the Tigris and would then occupy a point on the river bank west of the series of canals and consolidate a north and south line to connect with the right of the 9th Brigade. This brigade would clear and block the Turkish front line for a distance of 150 yards south-west of Z and would then occupy and consolidate a line along the canal from Z northward as far as the east and west track leading to Es Sinn. The 8th Brigade was meanwhile to occupy the canal from X to Z, converting it into a communication trench, and also prepare it as a fire trench to face south-west as quickly as possible.

The various movements in relief were duly carried out; and the 7th and 9th Brigades, having effected their concentration and deployment, were in position ready to advance by 4.15 a.m. on the 17th April. The 7th Brigade were on the right on a frontage of four hundred yards, with the 9th Brigade on the left on a frontage of three hundred yards. The Connaught Rangers were on the right of the 7th Brigade on a frontage of one hundred yards disposed in great depth; including drafts for the Queen's Own Royal West Kent battalion in Kut, their effective strength was about 900; and their right was on the northerly of the two canals. To their left, on a frontage of three hundred yards, were the 27th Punjabis in three lines; and the 89th Punjabis and 128th Pioneers, each also in three lines, were in rear of the 27th. The 9th Brigade was on a frontage of three hundred yards, with its left on the southerly canal. In front were the 1/1st Gurkhas in two lines, with the 1/9th Gurkhas, also in two lines, and the 93rd Infantry and Highland Light Infantry, each in one line, in rear of them.

The distance from the British line to the Turkish trench to be attacked had been estimated in different reports to be half a mile to a mile, but the general opinion was that it was about a thousand yards. The artillery bombardment opened at 6.45 a.m. and ten minutes later the 7th and 9th Brigades began

their advance. By this time the morning mist had lifted. The artillery were to lift their fire at 7.10 a.m., but five minutes before this the attacking infantry reached the area under bombardment. Here officers leading the 27th Punjabis could see a line of bayonets along the enemy's trench evidently attached to rifles leaning against the parapet of the trench, whose garrison were probably crouching at the bottom of it waiting for the bombardment to cease. Deciding to seize this opportunity for surprising the Turks, even though it might mean some loss from the fire of their own artillery, the 27th, followed by the 89th in rear of them and by the Connaughts on their right, dashed at the trench and captured it as well as three machine guns and about sixty prisoners. The 9th Brigade on their left also followed the example of the 27th Punjabis and in spite of a considerable enfilade fire from their left front, were equally successful, capturing three machine guns and about a hundred prisoners.

Under cover of the British artillery barrage, both brigades then proceeded to carry out the remainder of their programme quickly and with little opposition. Some 300 Turks were killed in the trenches, about 180 were made prisoners and eight machine guns in all were captured ; and this at the cost of comparatively slight casualties to the British.*

By 8 a.m. the 7th, 9th and 8th Brigades were consolidating the line west of the six canals and southward to Twin Pimples, when the Turks started a counter-attack. In spite of the efforts of the Turkish officers, who were seen exposing themselves gallantly in trying to lead their men on, this attack could make no headway in face of the British artillery and machine gun fire, and finally withered away just before 10 a m. Between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. hostile movements to the south and south-west and reports that the Turks were pushing over reinforcements from the left bank of the Tigris to the right indicated further Turkish attempts to counter-attack, but they were all averted by the British artillery and by counter-movements.

At 1.15 p.m. General Gorringe visited 3rd Division headquarters and discussed the situation ; and at 1.50 p.m. he issued orders that the 13th Division were at dusk to take over the line occupied by the 7th, 8th and 9th Brigades, thus

* To senior British officers with the 7th and 9th Brigades it appeared that the attack had taken the enemy by surprise and had so demoralised them that with a little support the British could have seized and occupied the Chahela position without difficulty.

enabling General Keary to concentrate his division preparatory to moving forward to his third objective, namely, a line about two and a half miles due east of Sinn Abtar. General Gorringe also instructed General Keary to send an infantry brigade and a battery southwards to establish themselves in a forward position towards his third objective. In accordance with this request, General Keary sent instructions to the 37th Brigade to push down the trenches lying south of the Triangle for a distance of fifteen hundred to two thousand yards, but not to commit themselves to an engagement. They would be joined in the evening by a battery. At the same time the 7th and 9th Brigade commanders were warned of their impending relief and were told that when this was carried out they were to move to Rohde's Piquet; while the 8th Brigade commander was instructed to arrange for communication by means of a line of piquets between the left of the 13th Division and the 37th Brigade.

At 3 p.m. General Maude issued orders for the 38th and 39th Brigades to take over at dusk the 3rd Division line from the Tigris to a point due west of Rohde's Piquet; the 39th Brigade was to be on the right and the 38th on the left, while the 40th Brigade would be in divisional reserve at a position about a mile east of point X.

About this time a party of the 1/9th Gurkhas under Lieutenant Kemp discovered and captured twenty Turks and two guns left behind by the enemy about three hundred yards in front of the Gurkha line; and as it was impracticable to remove the guns by daylight a Gurkha company was entrenched to secure them, thus forming an advanced detached post.*

At 5 p.m. General Gorringe issued further orders. The 13th Division, supported by the Corps Artillery, were to attack a portion of the Chahela trenches, extending for about fifteen hundred yards from the Tigris, the next morning; and General Maude was to submit his plan of attack by 9 p.m. that night. An infantry brigade and battery of the 3rd Division would carry out the operation to the southward already ordered by General Gorringe, while the remainder of the 3rd Division would concentrate to support this brigade and to protect the left of the 13th Division during the next day's operations.

* General Keary was inspecting the 8th Brigade line when the report reached his headquarters that this post had been occupied; and when he returned he considered it was too late in the day to order its withdrawal.

The 36th Infantry Brigade would furnish working parties for the maintenance of the embankments and road between Mason's Mounds and Abu Rumman.

About 5.30 p.m. General Keary heard from the 7th Brigade that the Turks had cut the river embankment east of their Chahela trenches and that in consequence water was flowing past the 7th Brigade advanced posts. About the same time the 37th Brigade reached the vicinity of the Triangle, where its commander (General Fowler) heard that the enemy were holding the trenches he had been told to occupy. In consequence he decided to wait till dark before advancing. At 7.30 p.m., however, as he was about to start, he heard that the enemy were making a strong counter-attack against the 7th and 9th Brigades. This decided him to postpone an advance pending further information.

To enable the reader to follow more easily the fighting that occurred during the night of the 17th/18th April, it is advisable to summarise here the general disposition of the 3rd and 13th Divisions at dusk on the 17th. Their general line is shown on Map 20.

The 89th Punjabis held an advanced post on a mound near the river bank about half a mile in advance of the 7th Brigade main line, which ran southward along the most western of the series of canals. The Connaught Rangers were on their left and the 27th Punjabis on the left of the Connaughts. The 128th Pioneers formed brigade reserve behind the 27th Punjabis; and 7th Brigade headquarters were at the blunt salient in the original Turkish first line.

The line was carried on to the south by the 9th Brigade with the 1/1st and 1/9th Gurkhas holding the eight hundred yards or so of front line, the former battalion being on the right. This brigade had been told originally to hold a line from Z to the left of the 7th Brigade, but it will be noticed that the line actually taken up was somewhat in advance of this and that their left rested on a pronounced narrow salient, while the advanced Gurkha company securing the captured Turkish guns formed a detached post three hundred yards in front of the centre of the brigade line. The 93rd Burma Infantry were in support near point Z; and the Highland Light Infantry in brigade reserve were close to brigade headquarters north-east of Twin Pimples.

The 8th Brigade held trench ZX and a line extending over two thousand yards southward of it. Being unable to hold the whole length continuously, they occupied it with a series

of piquets, the 47th Sikhs providing those on the right and the 59th Rifles those on the left of the line; and they had five machine guns in the length ZX. A company of the Manchesters and sixty men of the 2nd Rajputs provided a line of piquets across the twelve hundred yard gap between the left of the 59th and the Triangle, where a half battalion Manchesters had been placed under the orders of General Fowler, whose 37th Brigade was, as described above, in that vicinity. The remaining company of the Manchesters and the remainder of the 2nd Rajputs (about 150 rifles) formed brigade reserve at Rohde's Piquet.

The 13th Division headquarters and their 40th Brigade were at Abu Rumman; the 39th Brigade were in the former British line eastward of Bait Isa; and the 38th Brigade were in the vicinity of Rohde's Piquet.*

For about an hour before sunset, which was at about 6.30 p.m., there were various indications that the enemy intended to assume the counter-offensive. General Townshend reported a hostile column, about 1,400 strong, marching towards Dujaila; battalions of the 7th and 9th Brigades sent in word that the enemy were massing troops about a mile to the south-west; a force of enemy cavalry were seen about two miles to the southward of the British left; and the Turks opened a bombardment of the whole British line. The British artillery, now within supporting distance, were warned that an attack was imminent and they put down a barrage in front of the British line,† while officers of the 38th and 39th Brigades in the 3rd Division front line, arranging details of the relief ordered, returned to their own units.

There was half a moon and, although the exact time is uncertain, it appears to have been about 7 p.m. that the long lines of enemy troops which had been discerned advancing from the west and south-west came up against the 7th and 9th Brigades. The first shock of the assault fell on and overwhelmed the Gurkha detachment with the captured guns and then on the 1/9th and 1/1st Gurkhas. For fifteen or twenty minutes these held their own against the series of successive Turkish waves, while sending urgent messages to 9th Brigade headquarters for reinforcements and ammunition and to the

* The 38th Brigade had been replaced under the orders of the 13th Divisional Commander on the afternoon of the 17th April.

† The artillery barrage does not appear to have been very effective, owing to the setting sun being in their eyes and also, apparently, to some misunderstanding which hampered close co-operation.

27th Punjabis and 8th Brigade, on their right and left respectively, for ammunition.* Hearing at 6.20 p.m. of the imminence of an attack, the 9th Brigade commander had ordered up his reserve (Highland Light Infantry) to reinforce his front, but neither they nor the 93rd Burma Infantry reached the Gurkha line in time. The 27th Punjabis had no ammunition to spare, but the 8th Brigade were able to send some escorted by two companies 47th Sikhs. These arrived with portions of the 93rd and Highland Light Infantry just as the Gurkha line gave way. The Turks appear to have first broken through at the junction of the 1/1st and 1/9th Gurkhas and the former battalion made an attempt to draw back its left to protect its flank. The accounts are naturally somewhat confused, but it seems clear that by 7.30 p.m. the whole of the 9th Brigade were in full retreat to the east and north-east in a somewhat disorganised state, pursued by an equally disorganised mass of enemy troops. The Turks captured trench XZ and some of them attempted to push forward towards Twin Pimples. But Colonel Campbell and his staff, collecting a few men and managing to rally a great part of the Highland Light Infantry, took up a position at Twin Pimples; and, with the assistance of some British artillery which opened fire opportunely at close range and supported by fire from the right of the 8th Brigade to the south of point X, he brought the Turkish advance to a full stop and forced the enemy to withdraw again to the trench XZ. Taking advantage of this check, the Highland Light Infantry and small bodies of other battalions in the brigade were reorganised, and subsequently some of them were sent to hold part of the line between Twin Pimples and the 8th Brigade right flank.

On the Gurkha right, Colonel Carey, commanding the 27th Punjabis, not liking the look of affairs, had ordered his supporting company to dig themselves in on his left flank facing south.

* Owing to the inadequate transport arrangements and the flooded state of the communications the arrangements for supply of ammunition in the field could not follow the normal procedure. At this time 250 rounds per rifle, including 150 rounds on the man, were kept in unit charge, and about 40 rounds per rifle were with the artillery brigade ammunition columns. In practice this meant that to ensure a proper reserve many brigades got into the way of forming " dumps " of ammunition which were quite unauthorised and generally forbidden. The shortage of ammunition apparently occurring among some units of the 7th and 9th Brigades seems to have been mainly due to their coming relief by the 13th Division, which used a different mark of small arm ammunition. The 8th Brigade, on the other hand, had collected before the counter-attack an additional reserve of small arm ammunition, from which they were able to keep their front line, whose average expenditure during the night was 400 rounds per rifle, fully supplied.

This work had been scarcely begun, however, when the Gurkhas swept through and past his left and left rear, carrying away in their retreat three of the 27th companies and the 128th Pioneers, then coming up to reinforce the 27th. These two last battalions were halted and rallied by their officers at a point about three hundred yards north of 7th Brigade headquarters, where General Egerton and his staff were nearly overwhelmed by large numbers of 9th Brigade fugitives. General Egerton and the officers with him did all they could to stop the retreat and rally the men at brigade headquarters; but they were too few in number to stop more than a small proportion. With these they put up a gallant defence against the pursuing Turks, but overwhelmed by numbers they had after a time to fall back northwards towards the Tigris. In the meantime, some more of the men retiring had been stopped by the floods eastward of General Egerton's headquarters, while the remainder were rallied when they reached the positions of the 13th Division and the British artillery in rear. In the area between the line evacuated by the Gurkhas and the headquarters of the 7th and 9th Brigades, the confusion had been very great and it had been generally difficult to distinguish between friend and foe in the hand-to-hand fighting that took place.

During this fighting on their left, the Connaught Rangers and a company 27th Punjabis had held their ground with fine tenacity. The 27th company was moved back to cover the left rear of the Connaughts, whose commander, Colonel Hamilton, as soon as he saw what had happened, ordered his machine guns to come across from his right to his left flank. To give time for this movement, he ordered Lieutenant Kelsey of his battalion to keep back the advancing enemy by bombing. Lieutenant Kelsey carried this out effectually and gallantly by making repeated attacks with his bombers until his stock of bombs gave out. But he had effected his purpose, for by this time Lieutenant O'Brien had brought over the machine guns and had got them in position commanding the canals running southwards. Here they continued firing practically without ceasing for several hours and kept the advancing Turks at bay.

In the meantime, General Egerton, retiring northward, had come upon the 27th and 128th with a few other 9th Brigade details being rallied at a point about three hundred yards north of his headquarters under the direction of Colonel Carey. Reorganising all the troops now with him, General Egerton, after sending half the 128th to link up with the Connaughts,

started to advance southwards again, preceded by bombers. The enemy at once began to withdraw and then fell back more hastily before a charge by the 27th; and General Egerton was able to reoccupy his former headquarters as well as the trench for a short distance southward. Having failed here, the Turks ceased to make any determined attempts to advance further in this direction and concentrated all their efforts on trying to break through the left of the Connaughts. The position there, strengthened by the half battalion 128th, was, however, now more secure and withheld all the Turkish attacks.

The situation about midnight seemed to General Egerton to be critical. All communication with units had broken down early in the night and he was out of touch with the Connaughts and 89th Punjabis; the ground in his rear was rendered largely impassable by floods and no reinforcements had reached him; he had no definite news of the 9th Brigade; and it was evident that the 8th Brigade were being heavily attacked. At last, by means of orderlies, he got into communication with the Connaughts and 89th. The latter battalion had not been seriously attacked and were holding their position without difficulty; and the Connaughts, though short of ammunition, had, for the time being at any rate, definitely repulsed the Turks, who having fallen back a short distance were digging themselves in. At 2 a.m. there were still no signs of reinforcements and General Egerton decided that he must take steps before daylight to reorganise and consolidate a position where his left flank would be secure. In consequence he sent orders to the Connaughts, 89th, and detachments 27th and 128th to withdraw and occupy the old Turkish trench line between his headquarters and the Tigris. These orders had not long been despatched when an officer of the East Lancashire arrived from 9th Brigade headquarters with the news of approaching reinforcements. But in the existing state of communications General Egerton considered it was too late to cancel his orders for withdrawal.

In the meantime the 8th Brigade had also been heavily engaged. When General Edwardes sent the two companies 47th Sikhs with ammunition to the assistance of the 9th Brigade, he ordered the whole of his small reserve to reinforce his attenuated front line, the Manchester company and the 150 rifles 2nd Rajputs reinforcing the 47th Sikhs and the 59th Rifles. The first force of the Turkish attack having driven back the 9th Brigade and also having captured trench ZX and the trench for a short distance south of X, the situation

on the right of the 8th Brigade was very serious. The two companies 47th Sikhs escorting ammunition had been carried away in the Gurkha retreat; General Edwardes had no men left to reinforce his right; five of his machine guns had been captured in trench XZ; he had insufficient men to hold his own front continuously, though he had put every man who could hold a rifle into it; and he felt that there was no time without causing undesirable confusion to draw back his right to form any length of defensive flank. In consequence all that could be done was to order the Manchesters and 47th Sikhs to block the trench on the right and hold it to the last. In any case there was little time for reflection. At 7.50 p.m. heavy masses of Turks emerged from the scrub in his front and bore down on the 8th Brigade line, making repeated attempts to charge home. But the men of the Manchesters, 47th Sikhs and 59th Rifles, supported effectively by the four guns of the 23rd Mountain Battery behind them, beat off all attacks with grim determination. About 9.45 p.m. news came from 9th Brigade headquarters that they had rallied part of their men at Twin Pimples and could help the 8th Brigade by sending 150 of the Highland Light Infantry to their support; and at 10.30 p.m., having beaten off two heavy assaults, and the Turkish attacks having for the time being died away, 8th Brigade headquarters were able to send a reassuring message to General Keary, to whose action it is now necessary to turn.

Reports of the near approach of the Turkish attacking force were received at 3rd Divisional headquarters from the 9th Brigade just after 7 p.m.; and at 7.40 General Keary heard that the Gurkhas were being heavily assaulted. He at once asked General Maude to push forward quickly the 38th and 39th Brigades, a request that was repeated by Corps headquarters. Thereupon General Maude issued the following orders: the 39th Brigade were to move forward and support the 7th Brigade; the 38th Brigade were to send forward two battalions to 9th Brigade headquarters near Twin Pimples, while retaining two battalions near Rohde's Piquet to cover the left of the 3rd Division; and the 40th Brigade were to advance from Abu Rumman towards the Narrows.

At 8.35 p.m. General Keary ordered the 37th Brigade to close to their right and join up with the Manchesters at the Triangle; at 8.50, hearing that the left of the 7th Brigade was broken, he asked General Maude to send the 39th Brigade to Twin Pimples (instead of moving to the direct support of the

7th Brigade) in order that a counter-attack might be organised there; and the 7th and 9th Brigades were warned that when reinforcements reached them they were to push forward and regain the ground lost. General Maude issued orders accordingly to the 39th Brigade; but after a further discussion over the telephone with General Keary it was decided that only one battalion of the 39th Brigade should proceed to Twin Pimples and that the other two battalions should remain where they were and with the 40th Brigade, then approaching, form a strong second line to meet the possible contingency of the Turks breaking through. By 10.10 p.m. the 40th Brigade had arrived and started to dig themselves in. Here many of the 9th Brigade were rallied and reorganised.

About 10.30 p.m. the 9th Worcestershire (39th Brigade), the 6th East Lancashire and the 6th South Lancashire (38th Brigade) reached Twin Pimples; and, soon after, General Keary learnt that Colonel Campbell was sending the Worcestershire and East Lancashire to General Egerton's assistance to clear the trenches between his headquarters and point Z, and the South Lancashire to point X, whence they were to work in both directions, i.e., towards Z and towards the right of the 8th Brigade. At 11.5 p.m. the Turks started a third heavy attack on the 8th Brigade directed mainly against the 59th Rifles; and General Edwardes asked both the 9th and 37th Brigades for assistance. About this time the signal officer of the 7th Brigade who had been carried away by fugitives of the 9th Brigade, with whom he had remained trying to rally them, arrived at General Keary's headquarters, reporting that he was afraid that General Egerton and his staff had been killed or captured, though he believed that the 89th and Connaughts were still holding the right of the line.

At 11.15 p.m., being again asked by the 8th Brigade whether it was possible to reinforce them and considering from the reports of the 9th Brigade that the position about his centre was improving, General Keary asked General Maude to send two battalions of the 40th Brigade to support the 59th Rifles on the 8th Brigade left. General Keary heard at the same time from the 13th Division that an officer of the Worcestershire had just brought news to 40th Brigade headquarters that part of the 7th Brigade were holding a position at their brigade headquarters at the blunt salient but wanted reinforcements; and that General Maude had instructed the 39th Brigade to send these.*

* A company of the 9th Royal Warwickshire sent forward some time later found the water too deep to get through and were forced to retire again.

At 11.45 General Keary ordered the 37th Brigade to send a battalion to relieve a battalion of the 38th Brigade being sent to Twin Pimples and to move the balance of the 37th Brigade and the half battalion Manchesters to close up to the left of the 8th Brigade. Half an hour later the Manchester bombers on the right of the 8th Brigade gained a local success against the Turks, capturing a machine gun, while the South Lancashire were reported to be bombing their way forward from X towards Z; and soon afterwards General Keary heard from 9th Brigade headquarters that General Egerton was holding his headquarters and the trench for three hundred yards southward of it towards Z, that there were no enemy for a further three hundred yards southward and that General Egerton was collecting troops with a view to an advance in this direction. At 12.50 a.m. on the 18th a report from the 37th Brigade showed that they had closed on the Triangle and had moved the Manchesters and 36th Sikhs northward to join up with the left of the 8th Brigade, while the 2nd Gurkhas were facing south on the 37th Brigade left and the Somerset had gone to join the 38th Brigade.

The 6th East Lancashire and 9th Worcestershire reached General Egerton's headquarters between 2.30 and 3 a.m., their progress having been slow owing to the floods, the darkness and the general uncertainty regarding the situation. The East Lancashire were ordered to work down the trench towards Z and the Worcestershire held a trench to the west of 7th Brigade headquarters. By this time telephonic communication had been restored between 7th and 9th Brigade headquarters; the Connaughts and 89th had begun their withdrawal, which they completed without much difficulty by 4 a.m., by which time the East Lancashire had reached within two hundred yards of Z; and at 4.30 a.m. General Egerton moved his headquarters to Twin Pimples for greater facility of communication with 9th Brigade and 3rd Division headquarters.

The 4th South Wales Borderers and 5th Wiltshire (40th Brigade) arrived at the 8th Brigade position about 2 a.m. and were sent to support the 59th Rifles. At 3 a.m. the Turks made their fourth distinct attack on the 8th Brigade line, again directed mainly against the part of the line held by the 59th. Half an hour later the 47th Sikhs reported large enemy bodies massing to their front, and at 4 a.m. the Turks launched their fifth attack against the 8th Brigade, continuing to push in men with great vigour until it began to get light

soon after 5 a.m. But, though in some cases they got quite close to the British line, they failed entirely to break the stout defence of the 8th Brigade, who had that night covered themselves with glory ;* and by 5.30 a.m. the Turks in that area were in full retreat under heavy British artillery, machine gun and rifle fire. By 5.45 all was quiet.

This heavy counter-offensive by the Turks had been quite unexpected. They had never before attempted a counter-attack with such a large force, so well organised and sustained, or carried through with such vigour and determination. From information obtained on the spot after the battle it is understood that the Turks employed at least twelve battalions in this attack, including eight belonging to the famous 2nd Division. But to learn the full details of this operation, with the forces employed and the underlying reasons for it, we shall probably have to await the Turkish official account. It is clear that they attached considerable importance to the operation. They may have considered it essential to regain Bait Isa owing to the facilities it gave them for flooding the country and covering their right flank ; they may have thought that the floods behind our advanced division offered them an opportunity for destroying it in detail ; they may have regarded with apprehension our closer approach to Es Sinn ; or they may have had other reasons of which we have no cognisance.†

Though their attack was a tactical failure, it was through no lack of bravery on their part ; for, when day broke fully, masses of their dead could be seen along the British front. Within five hundred yards of the 8th Brigade line alone there were twelve or fifteen hundred bodies ‡ and many more could be seen further off ; and the trenches in front of the 7th and 9th Brigades were blocked with dead. General Gorringe estimated the total Turkish casualties at between four and five thousand. Although this defeat cost the Turks dearly the operation resulted, as will be seen, in stopping the British progress along the right bank ; and it may be that in deducing the lessons to be learnt from these operations it will be held that this Turkish counter-attack had in reality a successful and decisive effect.

* Of the supporting artillery, the 23rd Mountain Battery rendered especially effective assistance.

† A British occupation of Chahela would have rendered the Turkish position at Sannaiyat more precarious and have brought the Maqasis ferry within range of General Gorringe's artillery.

‡ Some German officers were among them.

For three or four days previously the Turks had been reported to be active in ferrying troops across at Maqasis, apparently from the left to the right bank of the river, and there had been indications of withdrawal of men from their Sannaiyat position, though this was still held in some strength. It was, therefore, considered possible that a part of the 51st or 52nd Divisions were being moved to the right bank.

The British casualties on the 17th and night of the 17th/18th April amounted to about 1,600, of which the greater part occurred during the night. We also lost 15 machine guns. The 7th Brigade lost 508 officers and men out of an effective strength of 2,277, the 8th Brigade 310 out of 1,954, and the 9th Brigade 531 out of 2,227.* Of individual battalions the 93rd Burma Infantry, 27th Punjabis and 47th Sikhs all incurred losses of over thirty per cent. of their strength. The main honours of the fighting during the night lay with the Connaught Rangers, No. 2 Company Manchesters, 27th Punjabis, 47th Sikhs, 59th Rifles, and the 14th and 66th Field and 23rd Mountain Batteries.

At 5.50 a.m., when it was quite light and the Turks could be seen in full retreat, General Keary ordered his two divisional cavalry squadrons to cover the gap between his left and the Umm al Baram and to take every opportunity of harassing the Turkish flank with dismounted fire.

At 6 a.m., when General Gorringe arrived at General Keary's headquarters, the general situation along the front was as follows. The Connaughts, 89th Punjabis, 9th Worcestershire and 6th East Lancashire, in this order from the right, held the former Turkish first line trench from the Tigris to near point Z; and the 27th Punjabis and 128th Pioneers were in reserve near 7th Brigade headquarters at Twin Pimples. The 9th Brigade were being reorganised immediately to the north-east of Twin Pimples. The 6th South Lancashire occupied the trench XZ for some two hundred yards from X and the line from there southward to the right of the 8th Brigade. This brigade with the 37th Brigade on their left prolonged the line to the Triangle, whence the 4th South Wales Borderers and the 5th Wiltshire carried the line eastwards facing south. The Turks, well provided with machine guns, were holding pertinaciously to the point Z and to a few hundred yards of the trench on either side of it; and they were also in close contact with the whole of the right of the British line. Of the remainder

* The effective strengths of the infantry of the 3rd and 13th Divisions on 16th April are given in Appendix XXVII.

of the 13th Division, four battalions (9th Royal Warwickshire, 7th North Staffordshire, 8th Cheshire and 8th Royal Welch Fusiliers) were holding a strong second line some eight hundred yards in rear of the 3rd Division right centre, while two battalions 38th Brigade (6th King's Own and 6th Loyal North Lancashire) were in the vicinity of Rohde's Piquet in support of the left of the 3rd Division.

At 7.45 a.m. General Gorringe, after a full discussion of the situation with General Keary, issued orders that after 8 a.m. the fighting area on the right bank would be divided into two sections by a line running from a point about twelve hundred yards south of Twin Pimples through the Narrows. General Maude, with the Corps Artillery on the right bank under his orders, would take command of the section north of this line and General Keary the section to the south of it including the maintenance of the causeway at the Narrows. As opportunity offered, and in communication with each other, each general would arrange to withdraw the units of his division to his own area, the 36th Brigade, which had been ordered forward to join General Keary during the night, being attached to the 3rd Division.

A considerable portion of the 3rd Division after its experiences during the night could not be relied on for effective offensive action for a few days and General Gorringe was consequently obliged to modify somewhat his former plans. But he still intended to attack the Chahela position, and General Maude was given instructions that his division was to push on and consolidate positions as far forward as possible.

General Maude ordered the 39th Brigade and the East and South Lancashire battalions, temporarily attached to this brigade, gradually to relieve the 3rd Division units to the north of Twin Pimples; the 40th Brigade to take over the line for about a thousand yards south of that point; and the 38th Brigade (less the two Lancashire battalions above mentioned) to take up a position near the Narrows as divisional reserve. General Keary sent the 36th Brigade to take over his front line southward of the 40th Brigade and ordered the 37th Brigade to put out a line of outposts running eastward from the left of the 36th Brigade. The remainder of his infantry, i.e., 7th, 8th, 9th and the greater part of the 37th Brigades, were to concentrate near Rohde's Piquet.

Efforts during the day by the East and South Lancashire battalions to recapture point Z met with no success; and hostile fire prevented the relief of the Connaught Rangers

and 89th Punjabis before nightfall. At 3.20 p.m. General Maude issued orders for the 39th Brigade to advance at 6.15 p.m. after a preliminary artillery bombardment and recapture part of the ground lost. But as the Connaughts and 89th could not be relieved and were not in a condition to carry out the attack, these orders were cancelled soon afterwards; and at 9.35 p.m. General Maude ordered the attack to be carried out at 7.10 a.m. next morning.

Some of the 39th Brigade had captured Point Z at about 4 p.m., but were soon afterwards driven out of it again. At the same time they were temporarily forced farther back owing to coming under fire from our own guns. During the night the 7th Gloucestershire Regiment, who had been in quarantine at Basra, rejoined the 39th Brigade; and with the withdrawal of the Connaughts and 89th, the 3rd and 13th Divisions completed during the night the readjustment that had been ordered.

That evening Generals Lake and Gorringe, coming to the conclusion that the enemy's strength at Sannaiyat had been reduced, decided to seize the opportunity and attack it. The assault was to be carried out on the 20th April by the 7th Division, supported by the 35th and 36th Brigades. In the meantime the 13th and 3rd Divisions would maintain pressure on the enemy on the right bank.

At 7.10 a.m. on the 19th April, after a twenty-five minutes artillery bombardment, the 39th Brigade moved forward to attack the Turkish line, which ran along a canal some six hundred yards away. But the Turks by flooding had converted much of the intervening ground into a boggy marsh, and this, with the heavy enemy fire, effectually stopped the advance and forced the 39th Brigade to withdraw to their trenches.

Desultory fighting continued throughout the day and though the 13th Division incurred over 600 casualties they made little progress.* During the next few days intermittent fighting went on and the 13th Division continued their attempts to advance through the marshy ground to their front. Point Z was captured after dark on the 20th, but, except for this, the operations on the right bank during the remainder of the month effected little further progress.

* By this time, owing to their losses in officers and non-commissioned officers, the 13th Division was no longer as efficient a fighting formation as it had been previously; and the division also suffered from having no Indian followers like other British units and from its lack of experience in making the best of conditions in the East.

As the progress hoped for on the right bank had not been attained, the only chance remaining of effecting the relief of Kut in time appeared to lie in a final attempt to capture the Sannaiyat position by direct assault.

On the 18th April the forward trenches of the 7th Division on the left bank, held by the 19th and 21st Brigades, were from five hundred to six hundred yards distant from the Turkish front line at Sannaiyat. The continuous work on sapping forward had been much interfered with by constant flood encroachments from river and marsh ; and, during the previous night, floods from the rising Tigris had joined the marsh encroachments, with the result that there was a continuous sheet of water about one hundred yards wide between the British and Turkish lines. On the night of the 18th/19th, however, British patrols from the 21st and 19th Brigades found a strip some six hundred yards wide about the centre of the line where the water was only a few inches deep except for shell holes and over which an advance would be less difficult than through the deeper water and slippery mud to the north and south. General Younghusband, who had received orders on the evening of the 18th to prepare for assault on the 20th, proposed to General Gorringe that he should make his attack across this strip with two brigades in front advancing side by side. To this General Gorringe agreed.

During the morning of the 19th April General Lake went forward with General Gorringe and made a personal inspection of the position, coming to the conclusion that the floods were a greater impediment to progress than the enemy.* As a result of this discussion, at midday General Gorringe ordered a postponement of the assault to give the water a chance of drying up and to allow of more thorough preparation for the assault. Such a postponement would have been necessary in any case, for at 3 p.m. the wind veered round suddenly to the northward, driving the water of the Suwaikiya marsh, in the next two or three hours, into the 7th Division trenches and right across the shell-pitted area to their front to join the Tigris flood. The 21st Brigade who held the right half of the line were obliged to evacuate their trenches and to begin once more the weary task of digging fresh ones behind the parados of those filled with water.

* Throughout the operations General Lake kept in close and continual touch with General Gorringe. He had not taken over the actual command of the troops, considering it best to leave this to General Gorringe, as he and the troops were by this time so well acquainted with each other. But General Lake was consulted about and approved all important decisions before they were carried into effect.

At 10 p.m. the wind dropped again, but the water fell slowly, and at 6 a.m. on the 20th when General Younghusband visited the trenches he found that the northern ones were still flooded and that the whole front was covered with water. Though in the centre the water was only six to eight inches deep, the mud below was generally very slippery and up to the men's ankles ; and the area was pitted with shell holes and in these and on both flanks the water was much deeper. In spite of this and in face of constant intermittent enemy fire, patrols from the 21st and 19th Brigades had penetrated during the night to within a hundred yards of the Turkish line, which they reported to be held in strength with machine guns posted on either flank. On hearing General Younghusband's report, General Gorringe decided to bombard the position thoroughly both on the 20th and 21st as a preliminary to assault at dawn on the 22nd. All his information from agents and prisoners was to the effect that large Turkish reinforcements with heavy guns were to arrive shortly at their Tigris front.

On the 19th April the 36th Brigade had been withdrawn from General Keary's command and moved to Abu Rumman ; and on the 20th the 37th Brigade was also withdrawn and sent to Twin Canals to relieve the 35th Brigade, which moved to Fallahiya. The road thither from Wadi along both banks was at this time impassable owing to the floods. Further arrangements for the coming assault were made on the 20th, and included the transfer of the command of the Corps Artillery on the right bank from General Maude to General Gorringe and the concentration of thirty-six machine guns (twenty from 38th Brigade and 8th Welch Pioneers and sixteen from 35th and 36th Brigades) and an 18-pounder battery at Crofton's Post.* During the day the weather remained fine, the river fell slightly, and the water between the British and Turkish lines decreased. Two bombardments of the Sannaiyat position during the evening drew a Turkish reply and appeared to have been effective.

During the night 20th/21st April the 2/104th Battery of 60-pounders was moved by river from Mason's Mounds to a position about three hundred yards south-west of Abu Rumman Mounds, whence it could bring a more effective fire to bear on the Sannaiyat trenches.†

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* This left 26 guns at General Maude's disposal, i.e., 9th Brigade, R.F.A., D/69th Battery, R.F.A., and 23rd Mountain Battery.

† The battery wagons moved along the causeway.

At 7 a.m. on the 21st General Gorringe held a conference at 7th Division headquarters with General Younghusband and his subordinate commanders. At this, the commanders of the 19th and 21st Brigades both agreed that the water on the six hundred yard strip over which they were to attack was not sufficient to prevent their advance ; and it was finally decided that the two brigades, each on a frontage of three hundred yards, should make the assault next morning. Corps and Divisional operation orders to that effect were issued during the day.*

The 7th Division, supported by the 35th and 36th Brigades, the whole under command of General Younghusband, and covered by the fire of the seventy-one guns of the Corps and 7th Divisional artillery and of the thirty-six machine and six field guns at Crofton's Post, would advance at 7 a.m. and deliver the assault nine minutes later. After capturing and consolidating the position, General Younghusband was to push forward and secure ground to a distance of some two miles westward of the Sannaiyat front line.

The artillery would begin to register at 6 a.m., continuing with a slow bombardment from 6.20 and carrying out an intense bombardment with high-explosive and shrapnel from 7 to 7.9 a.m., when they would lift their fire and establish a barrage in front of the 7th Division and assist its further advance.

On the right bank the 3rd and 13th Divisions would maintain pressure on the enemy in their front and be ready for a further advance.

General Younghusband detailed the 21st and 19th Brigades, in this order from the right, to lead the assault. They were to press straight on to capture and consolidate the enemy's second and third lines, leaving the 28th Brigade, advancing in immediate support, to occupy the first line. As soon as they had established their footing in the three lines all three brigades were to push outwards and secure the whole lengths of these trenches. The 35th and 36th Brigades were to concentrate and form divisional reserve near Divisional headquarters about a mile and a half in rear of the front British trench.

The effective rifle strength of the 7th Division infantry was only 5,966 (see Appendix XXVIII). Though the composite Highland Battalion † in the 19th Brigade was 1,297 strong and the composite English Battalion ‡ in the 21st Brigade 856,

* In point of fact, the Divisional order was issued before the Corps order. But the details had all been settled at the conference.

† Black Watch and Seaforths.

‡ Drafts for Norfolks and Dorsets in Kut.

these numbers mainly consisted of very young officers and men with a very limited training; and the same was the case in all the other battalions. The 35th and 36th Brigades were also very weak in strength. The 3rd Division on the right bank could only muster 4,347 rifles and the 13th Division about 5,500.

On the other hand, General Gorringe estimated that the Turks were opposing him with 8,400 rifles, 300 cavalry and 24 guns on the left bank of the river, with 15,500 rifles, 1,500 cavalry and 52 guns on the right bank, and were investing Kut with 3,200 rifles and 21 guns.

According to the available Turkish and German accounts the total Turkish strength at and below Kut apparently amounted to fifteen squadrons of cavalry, 93 guns* and 16,000 to 18,000 rifles† of which 2,500 rifles were investing Kut and the remainder seem to have been nearly evenly distributed between their right and left bank positions astride the Tigris. This, however, is a point on which the accounts are not very clear. It seems certain, however, that the British were about to undertake an attack on an entrenched position held by a force of at any rate equal strength.

On the 19th April Field-Marshal von der Goltz died at Baghdad of typhus fever, contracted on the Tigris front, and Halil Pasha was appointed to succeed him in command of the Sixth Turkish Army. Goltz had been ill for some time; he had a Turkish chief of staff, as the Turks had refused to agree to the appointment of Major-General von Gleich; and consequently German direction had little to say at this period to the Turkish operations on the Tigris.

From 7 a.m. to 8 a.m. on the 21st April a bombardment of the enemy trenches on the right bank was carried out in order to mislead the enemy; and throughout the day a systematic and apparently effective bombardment of the Sannaiyat trenches by British artillery took place. The ammunition for the 60-pounder guns, however, began to get so reduced that, as a further supply could not reach the front till a fortnight later, General Gorringe was obliged to curtail its expenditure.

A fairly strong north-westerly breeze blew all day, and, as the water along the British front had risen slightly, at 6.50 p.m. General Younghusband issued an alternative plan of attack to meet the contingency of a further rise of water. In this he said that if, owing to the floods, the attack had to be made on

* 80 field guns, 4 old 12 cm. guns, 3 old 12 cm. howitzers, 2 10 cm. naval guns, 2 3.7 cm. guns, 1 mountain gun, 1 British 18-pounder Q.F. gun.

† 35th, 45th, 51st, 52nd and three-quarters 2nd Divisions.

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Sannaiyat: 23rd April 1916. (Aeroplane photograph.)

a one brigade front, it would be carried out by the 19th Brigade, supported by the 28th Brigade. In this case the 21st Brigade would remain in the position it then was, and would cover the right flank of the assaulting brigade with rifle and machine gun fire.

Patrols sent out during the night of the 21st/22nd, however, reported that on the frontage allotted for the advance of the 21st Brigade the water seemed to be receding, while on the 19th Brigade frontage the ground was nearly free of water and was only covered by a shallow layer of mud. A patrol of the Highland Battalion reported at 11 p.m. that the Turkish front trench seemed to be only weakly held.*

The Turkish position consisted of three main lines of trenches roughly parallel to, and about a hundred yards apart from, one another, while in rear of the centre of the third line was another short line of trenches about three hundred yards long; and there were three main communication trenches leading from their right, centre and left some distance back to their left rear. The northern portion of this position was known to have been flooded at times by the water of the Suwaikiya marsh, and it seemed certain that many of the Turkish trenches were full of water. Behind the Turkish position, however, the Suwaikiya marsh bent back sharply to the north-west and consequently the ground over which Turkish reinforcements for the position would have to advance was very much drier than the ground in rear of the British front line. Moreover, the wet ground in the Turkish main position would tend to lessen the effect of the shells from the British bombardment. So that, altogether, the flood conditions were generally in favour of the defenders, though this advantage would decrease if they attempted any extended counter-offensive. In fact, the conditions would not have justified an assault if time had not been of such importance.†

During the night of the 21st/22nd April all preparatory arrangements ordered for the attack were carried out successfully, and at 6 a.m. General Younghusband reported to Corps headquarters that all was ready. The 21st Brigade was

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* On receipt of this report the 19th Brigade commander suggested sending strong patrols at about 3 a.m. to occupy the enemy's front line trenches and following with the remainder of his brigade as soon as the patrols were established; but this was not approved.

† Edmund Candler, the official eye-witness, who was present near Crofton's Post during the attack, says in "The Long Road to Baghdad" that it was doubted if the Turks would put up a serious resistance. There is nothing to confirm this in the official records.

formed up on the right in a series of lines with the composite English battalion leading, and on its left General Peebles, commanding the 19th Brigade, had formed up his two leading battalions, the 92nd Punjabis on a one hundred yard frontage on the right and the Highland Battalion on a two hundred yard frontage on the left, followed in second line by the 28th Punjabis and 125th Rifles. Three hundred yards in rear of the 19th and 21st Brigades, on a frontage of six hundred yards, was the 28th Brigade, formed in four lines. About three-quarters of a mile in rear of the 28th were the 36th and 35th Brigades, one behind the other in this order.

At 6.5 a.m., just after the artillery had begun to register, General Younghusband received a report by telephone from the 21st Brigade saying that an advance over the front allotted to them was not feasible on account of the water and requesting that the attack should be carried out on a one brigade front only. This was unexpected, as previous reports had shown no increase in the water nor in the difficulties in the way of an advance by the 21st Brigade; but General Younghusband decided, in view of this last message, that the assault was to be made by the 19th Brigade only, supported by the 28th Brigade. This decision was subsequently approved by Corps head-quarters.

At 7 a.m., when the intense phase of the bombardment commenced, the assaulting infantry began their advance under its cover and that from the machine guns and guns at Crofton's Post. Between the British and Turkish front lines, roughly four hundred yards had to be traversed. The enemy opened a fairly heavy fire, but without at first causing many casualties, and the advance was carried out so rapidly that the infantry had to check for a couple of minutes till the artillery fire lifted. The Highlanders and 92nd Punjabis then pushed forward again and passing through the Turkish first line reached their second line. Both these trenches were full of water, as were the numerous communication trenches and dug-outs* between the two lines. In consequence, the ground between was a deepish quagmire and the infantry progress was very slow, many men sinking up to their armpits in mud and water. The hostile fire had increased in intensity and appeared to come mainly from a line about two hundred yards in rear of the Turkish third line and from trenches in the southern part of their first and second line, where the Turks had machine guns effectively covered from the fire from Crofton's Post. Continuing to

* Some of these were quite full of soft mud.

advance, some of the leading troops of the 19th Brigade managed to reach the enemy's third line, though under very heavy fire to which large numbers of the assaulting force were unable to reply as their rifles had got clogged with mud and would not work. It appears that the assaulting lines had advanced in rather too northerly a direction and that this had brought part of them against some of the most flooded of the Turkish trenches.

Just after they had commenced their advance, the 19th Brigade asked that some of the 21st Brigade should support the 92nd Punjabis, and this was done soon after by the composite English battalion. Between 7.10 and 7.25 a.m. General Younghusband received a series of telephone messages from the 19th Brigade, which reported a Turkish counter-attack and their own front line checked. About 7.13 General Younghusband ordered the 36th Brigade to move up in rear of the 21st Brigade and the 35th Brigade to take up the position vacated by the 36th Brigade. At 7.19 to 7.23 the 19th Brigade reported that the Highland Battalion had got in, that a very heavy enemy counter-attack was being pushed in from the rear, and that they themselves were bringing up their brigade reserve, which had halted in the British front line trench, to reinforce their first line. Two minutes later the 19th Brigade reported heavy enfilade fire from the south, which made reinforcement very difficult, whereupon General Younghusband ordered the 28th Brigade to move up to the left of the 19th Brigade and advance against the enemy on that flank. At this time the 28th Brigade were at least half a mile distant from the Turkish first line.

At 7.35 a.m. the composite English battalion of the 21st Brigade began to advance in support of the 92nd Punjabis, and at the same time General Younghusband heard from the 19th Brigade that the Turkish counter-attack had been brought to a standstill, largely owing to our covering artillery and machine gun fire from Crofton's Post. In the meantime, however, the weak brigade reserve of the 19th Brigade, of which the two battalions* could not muster six hundred effective rifles between them, had been met by such a heavy hostile machine gun and gun fire as soon as they left the British front trench that they had not been able to advance more than two hundred yards; and then came a further Turkish counter-attack, directed mainly against the left of the Highlanders.

* 28th Punjabis and 125th Rifles.

Fighting with the greatest gallantry, Highlanders and Punjabis, most of them in mud and water up to their knees and many of them without the use of their rifles, beat back this counter-attack at close quarters and, effectively supported by the British artillery and machine guns, again brought it to a halt.

But at 8 a.m. the Turks again renewed their counter-attacks, and at the same time the 19th Brigade asked for all the artillery support possible as the English Battalion on their right was retiring. Three minutes later the 19th Brigade reported that they themselves would endeavour to counter-attack on their left, but immediately afterwards they reported that their leading troops were retiring, though they did not believe that all the Highlanders had yet been driven out of the enemy's trenches. They confirmed this opinion three minutes later and said that the situation could be restored if a strong attack were made south of the Highland Battalion. At this time the 28th Brigade were already moving up to make such an attack, but they were still too far off to intervene effectively; and by 8.20 a.m. all the assaulting troops were back in the British line and the attack of the 28th Brigade was countermanded.

It appears that the composite English battalion had advanced rather too far towards the north and in face of heavy enfilade machine gun fire from their right front had reached the Turkish first line successfully and were pushing on, most of their line being on the right of the 92nd Punjabis though some were intermingled. In this part of the Turkish line the water was much deeper than further south and an officer of the English Battalion,* apparently considering further progress impossible, gave the order to retire. The English Battalion at once proceeded to do so, and the 92nd, their flank being open, also gave ground, but in good order; and then the whole line began to crumble backwards and gradually the whole retired. It is said that many of the Highlanders, having already beaten back all counter-attacks and confident of their ability to hold their own, refused at first to retire, but that as the men on their flank fell back circumstances proved too strong for them. The accounts show that the Highlanders and Punjabis, covered by machine guns on both flanks, fell back steadily and stubbornly and that the behaviour of the very young officers and men who composed the greater part of these battalions was in every

* Neither his rank nor name are mentioned in the records, but it is said that he was killed in the Turkish position. In this attack, again, the lack of trained officers and non-commissioned officers was a grave disadvantage.

way worthy of our admiration. General Gorringe expressed his opinion of their conduct to General Peebles, the 19th Brigade commander, an hour or so later, when he thanked him and his brigade for their gallant effort than which, he said, nothing could have been finer.

Edmund Candler, who was present during the battle near Crofton's Post, gives a fine and graphic description of the fighting in his "Long Road to Baghdad"; and he pays a fine testimony to the gallantry of the 19th Brigade. At first little could be discerned from the right bank, but he describes how the Turkish counter-attack soon came across the dry ground in rear of the right centre of their third line in parties of fifty at a time and how about thirty of each batch were knocked out before reaching their objective by the British artillery and machine guns. These advancing enemy, he says, were hidden from our assaulting troops by the parapets and *bunds* of the Turkish trenches until the Turks actually began to clamber over them; and among these Turks, he says, the havoc created by our machine guns and artillery was terrible.

At 9 a.m. General Gorringe arrived at advanced 7th Divisional headquarters and found that the troops who had retired after the assault were being reorganised in the British front line; the 28th Brigade on the left, 19th in the centre and 21st on the right; and the 35th and 36th Brigades had been moved up in support behind the right and left respectively. General Gorringe ordered an intense bombardment of the enemy's position to be carried out from 9.40 to 9.50 a.m. Reports from Crofton's Post at 9.14 and 9.30 a.m. reported lines of Turks retiring from the south of their position and suffering heavy loss;* but the opinion held at 7th Division headquarters was that it was impracticable to renew the assault. On the left bank firing now lessened considerably, though the machine guns at Crofton's Post continued to find targets at Turks reinforcing their position. These were estimated by British aeroplanes to consist of a division from Nukhailat.†

About 11.20 a.m. the Turks suddenly raised two Red Crescent flags and several medical officers with stretcher bearers at once began to move forward from their third line to attend to their

* Any intention of the Turks to advance beyond their first line was frustrated by our artillery and machine gun fire.

† It was estimated at General Gorringe's headquarters that the Turks had employed 5,000 rifles in beating off the attack.

wounded. Though accompanied by armed men, their intentions were evidently pacific and the British ceased firing; and then, obtaining permission to do so from General Younghusband, raised Red Cross flags and sent out medical officers themselves. An informal truce was thus observed and the British were able to recover and evacuate all their wounded as far as the Turkish second line. Beyond this the Turks would not allow the British stretcher parties to go, claiming the British wounded there as prisoners of war but guaranteeing them medical assistance and treatment. At 2 p.m. the British took down their Red Cross flags and fired a few shots to indicate that the truce was over, but the Turks took no notice and both sides evacuated wounded across the open all the afternoon without hindrance.

This action on the part of the Turks was curious, and some British officers present inferred that it was a ruse to suspend hostilities for purposes of their own other than to attend to their wounded. It is impossible from information at present available to hazard an opinion; but reports from Crofton's Post all affirm that the Turks had suffered very heavy casualties. The machine guns there had fired 165,000 rounds during the attack and up to the armistice, and all the while at good targets.

The casualties in General Younghusband's 7th Division amounted to 1,283. Of these the 19th Brigade had suffered 942* out of an effective strength of 2,165, the English Battalion of the 21st Brigade 203 and the 51st Sikhs (28th Brigade) 65.†

In an interview that day (22nd) with General Lake, General Gorringe said that to call on the men for further efforts, within the time limit imposed by the food supply of Kut, could no longer give any prospect of success, and that it was necessary to face the situation and abandon any further attempts at

* Highland Battalion 597 (including 20 officers); 92nd Punjabis 155; 125th Rifles 141; 28th Punjabis 49; i.e., over 40 per cent. in three battalions.

† Candler, the official "Eye-Witness," who had the best of opportunities for hearing current opinion about this attack, summarises in his book "The Long Road to Baghdad" the two main views held at the time by officers engaged.

To observers on the left bank who saw our attacking troops staggering in the mud, waterlogged, mown down and unable to return the enemy's fire the position appeared hopeless. But to observers on the other side of the river, to whom the terrible havoc among the Turks caused by our artillery and machine gun fire from Crofton's Post was visible, it seemed that the back of the Turkish resistance was broken and that supporting troops in strength pushed in over the enemy's first and second lines while they were held by the 19th Brigade would have ensured the capture of the position; and they consider that the Turk's desire for a truce was intelligible enough.

relief. General Lake, though he instructed General Gorringe to continue operations on the right bank with a view to an attempt to break through the Sinn position south of the Tigris, sent the following telegram that night to India and London :—

> ". . . . Gorringe considers that the troops have, for the present, reached the limit of their offensive powers and that they are not capable of further effort without two or three days' rest. They have been engaged continuously since 5th April, fighting the enemy and floods, and have in this period incurred 9,700 casualties, which represents twenty-five per cent. of his effective fighting force. We are still twelve miles from Kut on the right bank and fifteen miles on the left bank. Floods on either flank limit our power of manœuvre, and each attack, without several days of artillery preparation which our time limit precludes, is costly . . . ."

At the same time General Lake sent Sir Beauchamp Duff a personal telegram amplifying his official report. The troops were, he said, worn out ; but for the floods and the tired state of the men the attacks on Bait Isa on the 19th and on Sannaiyat that morning would have been successful. The dearth of trained officers was most marked ; and only a few British units of the 3rd and 7th Divisions, and those reduced to mere skeletons, were capable of sustained offensive action. The corps and divisional commanders all agreed on the necessity for a rest and General Lake had decided on giving the troops three or four days comparative rest before the next attempt. Though this would lessen the chances of relief, he felt that he had no other alternative. He told General Duff that he had never before seen General Gorringe anything but confident and he understood that General Gorringe's attitude represented that of all the divisional commanders.

In considering the above telegrams it must be borne in mind that, in addition to encountering exceptional climatic and physical difficulties during the operations, the troops had lately been subsisting on a scale of rations which was far from being sufficient, but which the shortage of transport had made it impossible to augment. In addition, the bulk of the British force consisted of young, immature and inexperienced officers and men.

On the 23rd April General Townshend asked whether in all the circumstances, which he summarised, the time had not come to open negotiations with the Turks regarding the Kut

garrison. General Lake repeated this telegram to India and London, adding that neither General Gorringe nor his senior divisional commander were sanguine of success; but that he would make another effort, though if it failed it might entail heavy casualties. He asked for drafts for all his infantry units or reinforcements of at least two infantry brigades; and he requested authority, if the attempt failed, to open negotiations with the enemy.

This telegram of General Lake's crossed one from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff asking whether the time had not come to open negotiations to prevent the Kut garrison starving.

General Lake replied on the 24th saying that he had still one chance of saving the situation, having arranged with the Naval Commander-in-Chief to attempt that night to run a ship with one month's supplies into Kut. The navy were not sanguine of success owing to the heavy river current, but he himself was unwilling to neglect the chance as, if he could thus gain a month, more deliberate and less costly methods of attack could be carried out and his casualties would be replaced.

If the attempt failed he was prepared to make another effort to force his way through and he knew that General Gorringe and his troops would do their utmost; but he was not confident of a successful result. He would have to commit the whole force and a repulse might render his position on the Tigris dangerous, as he had very few reserves downstream. He considered, however, that the attempt should be made rather than let General Townshend surrender while there were British troops within reach capable of further effort.

On the other hand it would—apart from the moral results of the fall of Kut—be sounder military strategy to negotiate as the Chief of the Imperial General Staff suggested rather than run the risk of destroying the only effective striking force in Mesopotamia by making a further effort. In this, he said, General Gorringe agreed entirely with him.

General Lake then proceeded to sum up, and in doing so he referred to a telegram Lord Kitchener had sent him on the 21st calling on him and his men to realise the importance for the sake of the national honour and the interests of the Empire of effecting the relief of Kut. This seemed to General Lake to imply that other than purely military considerations were involved, and if this was so he was prepared, if the steamer failed to get through, to make another effort to relieve General

Townshend before the 29th. But he was doubtful if the troops could do it in the time. If military considerations were to prevail, as the telegram from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff suggesting negotiations seemed to show, then General Lake considered it sounder to open negotiations; and he asked for a reply by next day, as the time was so short. Meanwhile General Gorringe's preparations for an attack on the 27th April would be continued.

The reply, sent by Lord Kitchener, Secretary of State for War, reached General Lake about midnight of the 25th/26th: ". . . . H.M. Government highly appreciate the gallant efforts made to relieve Kut and, having regard to all circumstances of case, feel that to call upon your troops immediately for a further effort would not be justified. Unless therefore you, Gorringe and the divisional commanders have reason to change the opinion already expressed regarding prospects of success, you are authorised, should the attempt to revictual Townshend fail, to open negotiations." The telegram continued regarding certain points to be remembered in carrying on negotiations, laid down that the policy on the Tigris, if and when Kut was given up, was to be defensive and mentioned the drafts that were being sent for British units in Mesopotamia.

The attempt to revictual Kut by the *Julnar* was regarded by the navy as indeed a forlorn hope. Nevertheless, practically every man volunteered for it. Lieutenant H. O. B. Firman, R.N., was selected for command, Lieutenant-Commander C. H. Cowley, R.N.V.R., of the Lynch steamer *Mejidieh* as second in command,* Engineer Sub-Lieutenant W. L. Reed, R.N.R., as chief engineer and a crew of twelve unmarried naval ratings were chosen from the different gunboats.

The *Julnar* had been prepared at Amara, ostensibly for work on the Euphrates, as secretly and expeditiously as possible. In point of fact, her real destination was, it appears, known to many, including the enemy. She was covered with protective plating, cleared of all possible woodwork, and filled with stores.

At 7 p.m. on the 24th, carrying 270 tons of supplies,† she started upstream from Fallahiya, her departure being covered

* Lieutenant-Commander Cowley had thirty-three years' experience of the river and during the campaign had performed specially fine and gallant service. His local knowledge had been invaluable throughout the operations and led to his selection for this particularly hazardous undertaking.

† The idea of placing barges alongside her had been discarded as decreasing her possible speed.

by all possible artillery and machine gun fire in the hope of hiding the noise of her engines and of distracting the enemy's attention. The sky was slightly overcast and there was no moon, but in spite of the darkness she was soon discovered by the enemy; and against the strong current she could not attain a speed of more than six knots. Though coming under heavy machine gun and rifle fire from Sannaiyat, which riddled her, she passed successfully until opposite the Sinn Banks, where she came under very heavy artillery fire as well. Still continuing, she came under more effective gun fire near Maqasis and a shell struck her bridge, killing Lieutenant Firman and wounding Lieutenant-Commander Cowley and a seaman. Maintaining her progress, however, the *Julnar* kept on under heavy fire until, opposite Maqasis, she struck a cable and swung round with the current towards the right bank, grounding immediately opposite Maqasis fort. Here all attempts to get her off failed and she was forced to surrender.

Of the brave crew Lieutenant Firman was killed and Lieutenant-Commander Cowley* and five naval ratings were wounded. The two former were awarded the Victoria Cross and decorations were given to the crew.

This gallant adventure is one of which the navy and the nation have every reason to be proud. The army in the last resource appealed to the navy to help them, and the crew of the *Julnar*, under no misapprehensions as to the dangers they ran and the unlikelihood of success, made the greatest response that men can.

This was the end. At 3.30 a.m. on the 26th April, after receipt of the Government orders mentioned above, General

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* The circumstances of Commander Cowley's subsequent death are uncertain. Enquiry during and after the war showed that he was only slightly wounded when captured by the Turks, and that he was separated shortly afterwards from the other *Julnar* prisoners. The Turkish authorities at first said that he was found dead when the *Julnar* surrendered, and then that he had been shot by the escort when attempting to escape; but they could not say where he had been buried. On the other hand, there were persistent rumours among the Arabs, among whom he was influential and popular, that the Turks shot him; and enquiries after the war produced a certain amount of *hearsay* evidence in corroboration of this. The grounds on which the Turks are alleged to have shot him are that they considered him an Ottoman subject. There is no doubt whatever that he was a British subject; but the Turks certainly bore him a deep grudge for the invaluable assistance which he was able to tender Force "D" through his local knowledge and his influence among the Arabs. He himself always said that the Turks would execute him if they caught him. That he still volunteered, believing this, for the forlorn *Julnar* project represents his action as still more worthy of our highest admiration.

Lake telegraphed directing General Townshend to open negotiations with the Turks.

In the hope of prolonging the resistance for even a few days, British aeroplanes had been dropping supplies into Kut since the 15th April. An account of this will be given in the next chapter, but it may be mentioned here that this task, in addition to causing the loss of two aeroplanes from enemy action, added considerably to the strain on the few British machines and airmen with the Tigris Corps and contributed greatly to the ill-health which overtook many of the latter after Kut fell.

The story of the negotiations leading up to the final capitulation on the 29th April will also be told in the next chapter.

It was indeed a sad ending, and one that all ranks of the Tigris Corps felt most deeply, to their long and weary struggle against adversity in nature and misfortune in combat. In the course of nearly four months' operations their losses had amounted to over 23,000 officers and men. On the 25th April, their effective rifle strength, including drafts and a few replacements which had gradually reached them, totalled 23,450, viz, 13th Division 6,600, 3rd Division 5,900, 7th Division 5,200, 35th Brigade 2,800, 36th Brigade 1,570 and 37th Brigade 1,380. Of these formations, the 7th Division, which had been with the Corps from the commencement of the relief operations, had only been out of contact with the enemy for three days. Of their battalions the 2nd Black Watch had at the end of April only 48 left of their original 842 and many of these 48 had been wounded; the 6th Jats had 50 remaining out of 825; the 125th Rifles 88 out of 848; and the 1st Seaforth Highlanders 102 out of 962; while other battalions had suffered almost as much. The total casualties of the 28th Infantry Brigade during this period numbered 3,731; and in all units the losses in officers had been exceptionally heavy.

The British estimate of the strength and distribution of the Turkish force on the Tigris at the end of April 1916 was:—

Right bank ..	10,900 men and 36 guns.
Left bank ..	7,100 men and 32 guns.
Round Kut and at Shumran ..	5,300 men and 28 guns.

According to the available German and Turkish accounts, however, their numbers were considerably lower than this.

On the 2nd May the men of the Tigris Corps were much gratified at the following message sent by H.M. the King Emperor to their commander:

> "Although your brave troops have not had the satisfaction of relieving their beleagured comrades in Kut, they have under the able leadership of yourself and subordinate commanders fought with great gallantry and determination under most trying conditions. The achievement of relief was denied you by floods and bad weather and not by the enemy whom you have resolutely pressed back. I have watched your efforts with admiration and am satisfied that you have done all that was humanly possible and will continue to do so in future encounters with the enemy. George R.I."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SIEGE OF KUT ; THE LAST STAGES.

THE failure of the attack on the Dujaila redoubt on the 8th March rendered it imperative, in General Townshend's opinion, to increase the time limit of the Kut garrison's capacity for resistance ; and the only way that he could see to do this was to reduce still further the daily ration.

By the 8th March his British troops were receiving daily only 12 oz. of bread, 1¼ lbs. horse or mule flesh and 1 oz. of jam ; all the cheese, bacon, butter, sugar, dates and tea had already been consumed, and the potatoes and vegetables had given out several weeks before.* The Indians, the great majority of whom still refused to eat horse or mule flesh, were getting 10 oz. of barley meal, 4 oz. barley for parching and ½ oz. *ghi*, but no rice, *atta*, vegetables, sugar or *dhal*. By reducing the bread ration of British troops from 12 to 10 oz., by killing some animals and by stopping the issue of grain to others, General Townshend calculated that he would have sufficient grain and meat to last till about the middle of April ; and this action he decided to take.

All accounts show how bitter was the disappointment of the Kut garrison at the failure at Dujaila ; and, knowing that the imminent floods would render General Aylmer's task more difficult, many of them it is said became depressed. In consequence General Townshend considered it necessary to issue a *communiqué* on the 10th March, in which he included two telegrams from General Aylmer, sent on the 8th, announcing the failure of the attack but expressing hopes of relief by another attempt at an early date. Then, after recapitulating very briefly what had happened, General Townshend asked the garrison to help him as they had done hitherto in order to keep the flag flying, a task in which he felt he had their full agreement and determination.

At the same time the garrison were rather cheered by the news that the Russians had captured Bitlis and were advancing on Khaniqin from Kermanshah, as well as by statements in Reuter's telegrams that a mutiny had occurred among Turkish troops at Smyrna and that Mahomedan priests at Constantinople were preaching against the Germans. On the other hand, the strength of the garrison was considerably reduced by deaths from wounds or disease, and most battalions could only muster

* A small quantity, mainly grown locally, was available for hospital use.

less than 400 effective rifles ; while observers reported that the Turks were bringing into position about seven thousand yards to the north two large-calibre guns.*

Reference has already been made to General Townshend's refusal on the 10th March to consider a Turkish suggestion to surrender.† But it seemed probable that, after their success at Dujaila and having in view the imminence of the floods, the Turks on getting his refusal would attempt another assault on Kut. Woolpress Village appeared to offer them a suitable objective and General Townshend consequently reinforced it with a company of the Norfolks.

Whether the Turks had any such intention is not known ; but the immediate chance of it was averted on the 14th March by the arrival of the floods. The Tigris rose 2 feet 8 inches and, overflowing its banks, covered the whole northern front of the Kut defences, Fort—Redoubts A and B—Middle Line, with a sheet of water several hundred yards wide, while Woolpress Village was also surrounded by water. The water continued to spread over the country round till only a few patches of higher ground and the raised tracks made by the Turks for their traffic remained visible to the garrison. The Turks were obliged to withdraw their lines round Woolpress Village to a distance of at least half a mile and to a greater distance still from the northern Kut defences. Here, on the 25th March, the garrison were compelled by the waters to evacuate Redoubts A and B and could only maintain communication with the Fort along a raised embankment. On the 26th the Tigris reached its highest level so far, and, to the great relief of the garrison, remained stationary for three or four days ; and then, as the weather turned fine, began to fall again. Although these floods precluded any attempts at an enemy assault, they added greatly to the work and discomfort of the garrison, who spent most of the nights in the last half of March in a continuous struggle to keep the water out of their trenches, positions and bivouacs.

Hostile operations during this period, though limited to ceaseless long-range firing and bombardment by artillery and aeroplanes, gave the garrison little rest, as no part of the area was ever safe. The bombardments were of daily occurrence though they varied considerably in intensity ; but the daily

* These two guns were disabled altogether on the 22nd and 23rd March by the two 5-inch guns in Kut, whose firing was " observed " by aeroplanes from General Gorringe's force.

† See page 359.

roll of killed and wounded steadily mounted up and increased the total casualties. The Turks were now making special efforts to disable the *Sumana*, but though they damaged her upper works, her 12-pounder gun and on one occasion the main stop-valve on the top of her boiler, the navy and the engineers between them succeeded in effecting the necessary repairs and she still continued her ferry work across the river. In view, however, of the increased attentions that the enemy were paying her, General Townshend was obliged at last to disregard the wishes of her commander (Lieutenant Tudway, R.N.) to maintain her in an efficient fighting condition; and her guns were removed and mounted on shore, while her commander and crew were forbidden to live in her. At the same time all possible precautions were taken to protect her from hostile fire by screening her with barges and *mahailas*.

On the 18th March the British troops' bread ration had to be reduced by a further 2 oz., and thenceforward it became more and more evident that the rations were insufficiently nourishing to maintain men's strength. Pangs of hunger made themselves felt and men began to find themselves unable to undertake the usual amount of work. Owing to their continued refusal to eat horse or mule flesh, the grain ration of the Indians was not reduced.

Rain fell on the first few days of April and added to the discomfort of the garrison anxiously waiting for the next attempt at relief, regarding the date of which it was impossible to give them any information owing to the number of Turkish spies in the town. On the 2nd April General Townshend felt it necessary to remind General Gorringe that, owing to the difficulty of crossing the Tigris, no co-operation on the right bank could be expected from the Kut garrison till the relief force arrived opposite them. General Gorringe replied that he realised this and relied only for co-operation on the left bank in the last stages of the relief.

Before dawn on the 5th April the garrison heard a very heavy bombardment downstream and were cheered greatly by news received at 8.35 a.m. that the 13th Division had captured the Hanna position. The garrison of Kut were kept ready to co-operate if opportunity offered and fire was opened by their 5-inch guns during the morning on Turkish transport crossing the Hai, and at 1 p.m. on Maqasis ferry; but in neither case did this fire appear to have much effect. Throughout the day bombardments were heard at intervals and Turkish reserves could be seen grouped in rear of their

Es Sinn position; and from dusk till about 8 p.m. the bombardment grew in intensity. But no further news reached the waiting garrison.

A further bombardment was heard early on the morning of the 6th, apparently in the neighbourhood of the Sannaiyat position, and feeling very anxious General Townshend telegraphed to General Gorringe for news. About 8 a.m. the Kut 5-inch guns opened on Maqasis ferry, where there was much activity; and their fire was apparently effective, for after a few rounds had been fired all movement seemed to cease. Haze and mirage, however, soon obscured the view; and there was still no news of the relief operations. Atmospherics interfered greatly with wireless communication, and it was not till next morning (7th) that General Townshend received a message sent off by General Gorringe at midday the previous day telling of the capture of the Abu Rumman and Fallahiya positions.

Heavy artillery fire was again heard from the Sannaiyat direction during the morning of the 7th and there was, General Townshend says, great excitement among the troops and the Arabs of the town. The rupee went up in value, a sign that the Arabs, who changed them for the troops, considered our chances of success to be good, and the troops were proportionately cheered. With a view to giving such co-operation as they could, the 5-inch guns kept up a bombardment on Maqasis ferry till obliged to desist owing to the mirage about 10.30 a.m.*

The Tigris round Kut had begun to rise again on the 4th April. By the 7th it had passed its highest level of March, and the water lay in great sheets extending for miles round Kut. This gave both the Turks and the garrison in Kut much work to prevent their trenches and positions being inundated. In the fort at Kut especially, the garrison suffered much at this time from the results of overwork in the floods, scanty food and the enemy's snipers.

At 1 p.m. on the 8th General Gorringe telegraphed to General Townshend that he was attacking Sannaiyat at dawn next day and hoped to capture it. General Townshend replied, saying that he did not want to give trouble at a time when

* It appears that General Gorringe did not consider that, at that stage, fire from Kut against the Maqasis ferry could effect much, as at 10 p.m. the previous day General Townshend had received a message from him recommending that such fire should be reserved till later; and General Gorringe amplified this on the 7th by saying that the fire would be more effective when he got far enough forward to reach the ferry with his guns also.

General Gorringe had so much to do, but that he considered he should receive more news, as if the relieving force were in difficulties, the daily rations in Kut (of which there were at that time only eight days left), would be immediately reduced.

Before dawn on the 9th the garrison heard the heavy bombardment by General Gorringe's guns and they stood to arms while their 5-inch guns kept up a steady fire on the Maqasis ferry. At 7 a.m. General Townshend telegraphed to General Lake for news of the attack, but only to hear later in the day that it had failed. This was most depressing news, as it meant that Kut could hardly be relieved by the 15th April, as General Townshend had hoped; and he had therefore no option but to reduce the ration once again.

On the 10th April in another *communiqué* General Townshend told the garrison of the failure of the attack; and he appealed to them, saying that he knew it would not be in vain, to help him by making a further determined effort to eke out their scanty means to enable Kut to hold out till the 21st April. He had to reduce, he said, the daily ration of grain for British and Indian alike to 5 oz., as he no longer found it possible to favour the Indians, whom he reminded that there was plenty of horse-flesh which they had been authorised by their several religious leaders in India to eat.*

This question of food forbidden by men's religion has always been a difficult one in the Indian army, and an emergency such as this had not been known before, at any rate on such a large scale. It was a common impression among the British officers of Indian units before the war that, if it was absolutely essential, their men would be generally prepared to accept a definite order that they were to eat what was necessary, and that they would be absolved by their religious authorities of any religious misdemeanour entailed by their action on the justification of emergency. Anyone, however, with experience of the power and influence which caste, religion and tradition exercise in India will understand the difficulties and dangers in issuing such an order, especially if there was any chance of it not being universally obeyed.†

There is evidence to show that many Indian officers in Kut did what they could to persuade their men to carry out General Townshend's wishes in the matter; but although some men

* This authority had been obtained by telegram.

† Many Indians told General Townsend of the social disabilities they would be bound to incur in India if they did as he wished and they did not believe that anything could be done to insure them against these.

had begun to eat horse-flesh at the beginning of April the majority still held aloof. By the 10th, however, matters had become most serious; men were fainting at their work and even dying from weakness through want of food; so that, in addition to his appeal, General Townshend felt obliged to bring all his influence and authority to bear on the matter, as it had come to the point when the men had either to do as they were requested or die from starvation. He was so far successful that the next day over 5,000 Indians were eating horse-flesh, and a few days later the great majority of them had followed this example. Unfortunately most of them were already too weak to obtain the full benefit from the better diet.

It is noteworthy to consider, in this connection, the opinions of Generals Melliss and Delamain, the two senior Indian army officers in Kut, as throughout the siege they were in very close touch with the Indian troops. General Melliss was in favour, at an early date, of issuing a definite order to Indian troops that they must eat horse-flesh, but General Townshend considered this too drastic a measure; while General Delamain considers that had a warning been issued officially at an earlier stage that the garrison were probably in for a long siege there would have been no great difficulty in getting the Indian troops to do what was required. Both these generals are of opinion that the *communiqués* issued strengthened the men in their refusal to eat horse-flesh, as after each failure these statements held out hopes of early relief and the men felt that they had only to abstain from meat for a little longer to save themselves from embarrassment and trouble on their return home.

The scale of rations now introduced for British was 6 oz. bread and 1 lb. meat, and for Indians 5 oz. barley meal, 4 oz. barley (for parching) and 12 oz. meat. On the 10th April General Townshend telegraphed to General Lake saying that he had reduced the ration to 7 oz. barley, which would enable him to hold out till the 17th. But it was possible that General Gorringe might not be able to effect the relief and the situation must be faced. If General Gorringe failed in his efforts, the Turks would grant no terms except absolute surrender, unless as had been suggested they were paid to let the Kut garrison go. If the Turks would give no terms at all, General Townshend proposed to endeavour to run the blockade in the *Sumana* with 600 or 700 picked men, and asked if Government would approve this.* He asked whether, if there was any doubt as to successful relief, it would not be wise to begin negotiations at once while

* There was some discussion of this proposal, but it came to nothing.

he had food, i.e., up to the 17th, to bargain with.* These negotiations should, he said, be carried out by the General commanding the relief force. He concluded his telegram by saying that there was not the slightest chance of his being able to break his way out, owing to the river, the floods and the weakness of his half-starved men.

On the same day (10th) General Lake suggested two alternatives for increasing General Townshend's time limit of resistance. One was by sending supply ships to run the gauntlet at night and the other was to evict the greater part of the local inhabitants of Kut. The first offered very little hope of success, though it might be tried as a last resource ; but General Lake asked for a report regarding the other. Next day General Townshend replied that it was utterly impossible to evict the population of Kut, who numbered some 6,000 souls. The floods prevented all attempts at escape by land, and the twelve *mahailas* or so available would not take half the numbers required. Moreover, the Turks were shooting at sight all Arabs trying to leave the town, and General Townshend quoted several recent cases of people killed in this way. Thus, even if it were possible to force the population out of Kut, they would all be butchered outside by the Turks.

On the night of the 11th/12th April, Brigadier-General F. A. Hoghton, commanding the 17th Brigade, who had been in poor health for some time, was taken suddenly ill from poisoning by herbs locally gathered, and died.†

On the 12th General Townshend learnt from General Lake that the air force commander thought that it ought to be possible for him, given favourable weather, to put 5,000 lbs. of supplies daily into Kut,‡ but that it would take two or three days to design fittings for dropping them.

On the 13th a heavy bombardment was heard from the direction of Bait Isa, but during the day news was received from General Gorringe that he had been obliged to postpone operations to let the ground dry after the heavy rain. On the same day General Townshend received further details of the relief operations from, and including those on, the 5th, and he learnt that, owing to the floods, operations on the left

* He really had food up to the 21st, but apparently thought it wise to leave a margin for errors and mishaps.

† In their craving for vegetable food many men gathered grass and other vegetation growing locally and this was the cause of many cases of poisoning more or less severe.

‡ General Townshend calculated that 3½ tons would give the garrison and population a 6 oz. ration each and that 5,000 lbs. daily would save the situation.

bank would be so slow that Generals Lake and Gorringe had decided on another and quicker plan of operations.* On the 14th General Townshend telegraphed to General Lake saying that by making the emergency ration last for two days instead of one he could hold out till the 24th. After that date he would be dependent on food dropped by aeroplanes, other than meat, of which he had sufficient to last till the 29th. He asked General Lake to let him know if he considered it necessary to reduce the grain ration to 4 oz., which in reality only meant 3 oz. of actual food ; and he said that 9,239 Indians were then eating meat, but 1,500, including sick and wounded in hospital, were still abstaining from doing so.

On the 14th all grain in possession of the town population was finished, and the military governor had to arrange to feed them on the donkeys and ponies belonging to the inhabitants. But as this seemed likely to lead to trouble, the strength of the military piquets in the town was increased. From then onwards the Arab population began to leave Kut every night in large numbers by river, the women and children on rafts or anything that would float, while the men swam. The Turks sent in saying that they would shoot all Arabs leaving the town, and all were warned of this. Nevertheless, night after night, many of them persisted and a few are believed to have escaped in this way, though the majority were shot by the Turks.

General Townshend asked on the 14th if General Lake could give him a date to which he wanted Kut to hold out, and also said that the idea of dropping food by air seemed the proper remedy to apply, but it should be begun quickly. In replying to this General Lake could evidently give no date, but he said that, though flying had been impossible the previous day owing to bad weather and was doubtful that day, all arrangements for dropping food were being made and that all that was possible would be done.†

On the 15th April General Townshend gave the ration strength of his force at 2,970 British and 10,870 Indian, and said that he estimated 5,000 civilians in addition would require food ; and he gave the articles of diet he required. That day he heard from General Gorringe that the 3rd Division had made some progress towards the enemy's Bait Isa position.

On the 16th General Gorringe telegraphed that the maximum quantity that the air service could put into Kut daily was

* See preceding chapter.

† Some experiments at dropping food had been carried out on the 11th and 12th April.

3,350 lbs., and that it would be advisable for General Townshend to reduce his daily ration forthwith to 4 oz. The rations in Kut were accordingly reduced that day, the British troops getting 5 oz. bread and 1 lb. meat and the Indians 4 oz. barley meal, 4 oz. barley for parching and 9 oz. meat. General Lake told General Townshend the same day that the Tigris Corps had with them ten aeroplanes and three seaplanes, though of course not all were fit for work. Two more seaplanes were expected that day from Amara and three more aeroplanes were coming up by barge. All machines not required for essential artillery and reconnaissance work would be employed in dropping supplies ; and General Lake had personally impressed the urgency of this work on his flying officers. On the 15th they commenced their food service, but as will be seen below their achievements did not come up to what had been hoped for. Some of the pilots had had little practice in dropping bombs or other articles, they had not the necessary instruments, and in some of the machines the planes had not been cut away to allow of the necessary clear view downwards. In consequence it was difficult for the pilots to judge when to drop their loads and some of them fell into the river instead of into the defensive perimeter. Moreover the bulk of the flour, the main commodity required, was so great in comparison to its weight that the machines could not manage to carry as much of it as had been at first supposed ; while the dead weights of all loads rendered the aeroplanes extremely difficult to fly.

General Townshend says that by the middle of April his Indian troops were very dejected, and that there were desertions or attempted desertions every night. The impression gathered from this and other statements on the state of General Townshend's Indian troops is not altogether borne out by the opinion of some of the senior Indian Army officers in Kut ; and it seems likely that General Townshend, from his frequent visits to the hospital, received the impression that the attitude of the sick and wounded Indians—the Oriental is often a bad and rather childish patient—represented that of the whole garrison. General Melliss says that he saw no signs of lack of spirit in his Indian battalions nor any reason to suppose that they would not have readily answered any call on them for offensive action, though of course in the last stages of the siege semi-starvation rendered them physically unfit. General Delamain considers that throughout the siege the Indian troops, like their British comrades, displayed wonderful courage and fortitude ; and Colonel Hehir, the Senior Medical

Officer in Kut, gives in his report a clear account of the condition of the garrison at the different stages of the siege, and in a note dated 18th April pays a fine tribute to the men :—

> "There is a vast amount of suffering from hunger amongst the troops, which is being borne with admirable patience and fortitude and arouses enthusiastic praise at the pluck and grit displayed by both our British and Indian soldiers. As one who is amongst the men daily and speaks with intimate knowledge of the conditions, the behaviour of the men in meeting these unfortunate conditions is heroic."

Mention has been made before of trouble and desertion among Indian troops in Mesopotamia, and it seems desirable in justice to the Indian Army to say that the number concerned did not amount to a large total, and these were generally Mahomedans, whose attitude towards the campaign deserves explanation. For religious reasons, no Mahomedan soldier liked the idea of fighting in Mesopotamia, and most of them comprehended and cared little about the fundamental causes of the war. In spite of this, their Indian officers, speaking on their behalf, professed their willingness and readiness to carry out the wishes of the *Sarkar* ;* and almost all the men themselves fulfilled their duty loyally and gallantly. The Turks employed ceaseless propaganda to seduce them from their loyalty, promising them lands, wives and money and appealing strongly to their religious feelings, which appeal was the more cogent that the Turks were Mahomedans serving directly under the Caliph. Moreover, the majority of those who deserted came from districts outside and across the North-West Frontier of India, where British authority had neither the power nor ability to protect their families nor to assure the rightful succession to their property in the event of their being killed ;† and in these districts they themselves could be certain of a secure asylum against any British measures of punishment. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a few men succumbed to temptation.

On the morning of the 17th April, hearing the heavy bombardment downstream, the Kut garrison again stood to arms and hoped anxiously for good news. Having heard nothing, General Townshend telegraphed for news at midday. In the evening the bombardment was heard again and, increasing in

* i.e., Government.

† The system of blood feuds current across the frontier has to be borne in mind in this connection, as it was often a potent factor.

intensity, it kept on for most of the night. Next morning (18th) General Townshend heard from General Lake that the 3rd Division had captured the Bait Isa position on the morning of the 17th with small loss to themselves; that they had been heavily counter-attacked during the night and had been driven back for five or six hundred yards, but that the line would be carried forward again when the brigades had been reorganised. Next day (19th) General Lake sent a further telegram saying that the enemy losses in the counter-attack had been very heavy, amounting to 1,200 to 1,500 within five hundred yards of the 8th Brigade trench and to many more elsewhere. This news raised the spirits of the garrison considerably, and, as the weather had become fine, many began once again to look for a speedy relief.

On the 19th April General Lake sent a telegram to General Townshend saying that he had been forward that day with General Gorringe examining the situation and he hoped that the Kut garrison would not have to wait more than a few days for relief. But the food in Kut was now nearly all gone, engine trouble, enemy aeroplanes and bad weather had all seriously interfered with the arrangements for dropping food, and since the 15th our aeroplanes had only been able to drop 4,400 lbs. altogether. General Townshend was consequently experiencing intense anxiety.*

At 4.20 p.m. on the 22nd, no news having reached him of the result of the heavy bombardment heard from Sannaiyat direction that morning, General Townshend telegraphed asking for news. To this General Lake at 7.50 p.m. sent the following reply: "Much regret attack on Sannaiyat position was repulsed. Gorringe, however, will not relax his efforts."

All food supplies in Kut, except meat, the food dropped by aeroplanes and two days' emergency rations, were finished on the 21st April. The two days' emergency ration sufficed for four days, 22nd to 25th, giving each man 6 oz. of biscuit and 6 oz. of tinned meat.† From the 26th to the 29th, men were fed upon the food dropped by aeroplanes, which allowed each man about 4 oz. a day.‡

* Since the 5th April the enemy aeroplanes had been so fully occupied against General Gorringe's force that they had left Kut practically unmolested.

† Fresh meat still being available, many men retained this tinned meat for use later on, when it came in usefully.

‡ The total amount of food dropped from the 15th to the 27th April was about 16,800 lbs. It was all dropped from heights of 5,000 to 7,000 feet, any attempt to drop from lower altitudes being prevented at first by Turkish gunfire and then by hostile aeroplanes. The largest amount dropped on any one day was not much over 2,000 lbs.

On the 23rd April General Townshend, referring to General Lake's telegram of the previous day, said that the news was very bad, and the fact must be faced that General Gorringe was most unlikely now to be able to effect the relief in time. For this reason he considered that General Lake should see if Halil Pasha would not permit the Kut garrison to go down in ships and join General Lake, Kut itself being given up to the Turks. These were honourable terms, and he expected it would cost some money to get Halil to agree to them; but the Turks could not feed or pay the Kut force and had not enough ships to take them to Baghdad, while if the men had to march they would all die from weakness or be killed by Arabs. If Halil insisted that the force must be paroled, it could be paroled not to fight against the Turks. General Townshend said that, if General Gorringe could not win through in the next two or three days, he thought that General Lake had better make up his mind to negotiate on the above lines. The Turks would no doubt allow General Lake to send up ships with food during the negotiations. In three or four days' time the men in Kut would be so weak as to be incapable of all exertion, and the stenches in Kut were such that General Townshend feared pestilence. The fact that there was illness and scurvy in Kut would be another argument for Halil to let the force go. General Townshend concluded by emphasising the desirability of getting the force paroled, which might easily be settled with money, especially as Halil had spoken of the defence in the highest terms. A decision was required quickly and General Townshend would want two days in which to destroy his guns and ammunition before leaving.

General Lake answered this telegram the same morning saying that it had been repeated to India and London, that General Townshend was not to take action on the lines suggested without further orders, and that much would depend on the attempt which the *Julnar* would make that night or the next to get through. In repeating General Townshend's telegram to India and London, General Lake said that none of his senior generals was sanguine of success, but he had decided that another effort should be made. He asked that if this failed he should be authorised to open negotiations on the lines suggested, and he requested an answer by the night of the 26th.

General Lake's other reports and action have been included in the narrative in the previous chapter, where it has been shown how finally everything depended on the attempt by the *Julnar* to run the gauntlet.

On the morning of the 25th April, when it was known that this attempt had failed, General Lake telegraphed to General Townshend that he had asked for authority to open negotiations on the lines suggested and expected a reply by that evening. The first arrangement to be made was to get permission to send ten days' supplies through for the Kut garrison and town. General Lake then asked if General Townshend had any other suggestions, and whether he considered he would be justified in destroying his guns after negotiations had been opened. There would also be the danger that if he destroyed them his position might be taken by assault.

At midday on the 25th General Lake telegraphed again to General Townshend :—

> "It is for consideration whether if Government sanctions the opening of negotiations you yourself will not be in a position to get better terms than any emissary of ours. You would of course be ordered by Army Commander to open negotiations for surrender, the onus not lying with yourself. You are in the position of having conducted a gallant and successful defence. You have already been in communication with Halil, and any terms they give must be dictated by a mixture of sentiment and convenience. Neither Army Commander nor you have any substantial *quid pro quo* to offer for your release other than possibly money, which he would authorise you to offer in such a manner as you might get an opportunity of doing. The Admiral, who has been in consultation with Army Commander, considers you with your prestige are likely to get best terms. We could of course supply food as you might arrange. Please wire your views."

This crossed a telegram from General Townshend which said in answer to the former one sent by General Lake that the ten days' food should reach Kut by the 29th without fail, that an armistice should be arranged to discuss negotiations and that, if Halil agreed and if General Townshend's views were required, he should visit General Lake in the *Sumana*. There was no time to lose as the garrison was absolutely run down, the Indians unfit to fight and the British, though retaining their pluck, dejected and very weak. His men were dying on an average of fifteen a day from dysentery, which the heat and smell of Kut were aggravating, and many were dying of scurvy. General Townshend did not contemplate bringing away his guns in any case. The 4-inch and 5-inch were obsolete and useless, and it would be a great labour to dismount

the 18-pounders and put them on barges. He would destroy all his heavy guns, and until conditions were broadly agreed on he was quite within his rights in destroying guns and ammunition. In an Arab country one could not destroy rifles and all rifle ammunition. The floods stopped all danger of an assault.

General Lake then suggested to General Townshend that his guns might constitute the only considerable *quid pro quo* that he could offer Halil in consideration of the garrison being allowed to go free; and the guns, he said, with only a small quantity of ammunition would be valueless to the enemy. If all terms were refused they could be destroyed. This telegram crossed the following reply to General Lake's suggestion that General Townshend should conduct the negotiations:—

> "I will certainly do whichever you consider best for the public service. If you order me to open negotiations, I shall personally see Halil and ask him to have six days' armistice for discussion of terms and allow you to send me up at once ten days' food supplies. None of the forces to advance from present positions or lines of defences."

At 3.30 a.m. on the 26th April General Lake telegraphed repeating part of the message he had just received from the Secretary of State for War* and directing General Townshend to open negotiations on the lines suggested. No proposals for a retirement of General Gorringe's force could be entertained, and General Townshend was authorised to dispose of a million pounds sterling† if necessary in the negotiations. The services of Captain The Honourable Aubrey Herbert, M.P., and of Captain Lawrence, of the Cairo Intelligence Staff, both at that time present with the relief force, could be placed at General Townshend's service if required; as they both had special qualifications for such work.

General Lake then telegraphed to London and India asking if he would be justified in offering to exchange for the Kut garrison an equivalent number of the Turkish prisoners held by us, and he told General Townshend he would let him know the result of his enquiry.

At 10 a.m. on the 26th General Townshend sent a letter to Ali Nejib Pasha, commanding the force blockading Kut, asking that Halil Pasha might be informed that he had been authorised to open negotiations for the surrender of Kut. He was, he said, just writing a letter himself to Halil asking for a six days'

* See page 435.

† Subsequently increased to two millions.

armistice to arrange matters and for permission to get ten days' food from downstream for the troops and inhabitants, who were threatened with pestilence, and of whom many were dying of dysentery. He would suggest that Halil should come to Kut to facilitate quick arrangements, and he wished Ali Nejib to ask Halil for permission for Captains Aubrey Herbert and Lawrence to come and join him. In a postscript he emphasised the urgent necessity of his getting the ten days' food immediately.

An hour later he sent a letter to Halil Pasha. In this, after saying that he had orders to negotiate the surrender of Kut, he expressed the desire for a six days' armistice ; and he asked for permission for ten days' food for his garrison and the inhabitants to come up the river, because he had no food left and had about 19,000 souls to feed, including sick and wounded. He was afraid that a pestilence might break out any day, as he had hundreds of sick in hospital and some fifteen daily were dying of dysentery. He therefore asked for an early reply, that he might telegraph for ships with food to come up. He would suggest an early meeting to discuss terms. He hoped, and with confidence, that Halil, who had already expressed admiration of his defence, would be generous and would allow his troops with their arms to proceed to Amara and India. These would be honourable terms, such as the Austrians had allowed Massena at the siege of Genoa in 1800, and were also the same as had been allowed by the British to the French in 1808 in Portugal. Moreover, Halil had neither enough food for the numbers in Kut nor sufficient river craft to transport them to Baghdad, while they were far too weak and threatened with disease to march. Further, they would have to be paid if taken prisoner. General Townshend concluded by asking permission for Captains Herbert and Lawrence to come and join him.

An answer from Halil was brought by his aide-de-camp to Kut that evening. After acknowledging receipt of General Townshend's letter, Halil said that after carrying out their military duty so heroically for five months General Townshend and his soldiers would meet the same reception in Turkey that Osman Pasha, the hero of Plevna, had met with in Russia, and that they could be certain of food, transport to Baghdad and their pay. Halil was leaving at once in a motor boat to discuss arrangements and suggested that General Townshend should also come in a motor boat to meet him.

General Townshend tried to start at once in the *Sumana* for this purpose, but when she began to get up steam she was shelled. So he arranged to go next morning.

On the morning of the 27th April there was an absolute cessation of hostilities at Kut. Major Sandes in his book "In Kut and Captivity" says:—

> "The stillness after so many months of noise was quite extraordinary. The day was calm, the weather fine and the river-flood had fallen considerably; the atrocious weather and flood conditions had lasted just sufficiently long to prevent our relief."

Before leaving to meet Halil on the 27th, General Townshend telegraphed to General Lake saying that he would propose that Halil should negotiate with British Headquarters regarding details which it was impossible for General Townshend to settle, and at the same time General Townshend expressed the opinion that General Lake should conduct the negotiations.

The two motor boats met about one and a half miles above Kut and General Townshend had a conference with Halil Pasha in the cabin of the Turkish launch.*

On his return to Kut at midday he telegraphed an account of the meeting to General Lake. He said that at first, although extremely nice, Halil declined to hold out hopes of anything but unconditional surrender followed by captivity; but that after some talk and a mention of money he said that General Townshend might entertain hopes of better terms, but that he must communicate with Enver. He, however, insisted that, before anything was done, the British force must move out of Kut into camp. To General Townshend's objections he said that he would supply tents, food from the *Julnar* and allow anything to come through to the camp. He wanted General Townshend to move at once out of Kut, but the latter replied that he must first consult General Lake. General Townshend then again suggested to General Lake that it would be better if the negotiations were carried out between Halil and General Lake.

General Lake's reply was despatched three hours later. He said that Halil's proposal practically amounted to unconditional surrender, and if he insisted on it further negotiations seemed useless. If Halil was willing to reconsider the matter and would allow the Kut force to leave for India on parole, General Townshend could offer him his guns, the money and probably exchange of prisoners, though General Lake had not yet had a reply from India on that point.

* He carried out the conference alone, his staff returning to their motor boat after the introductions had been got through.

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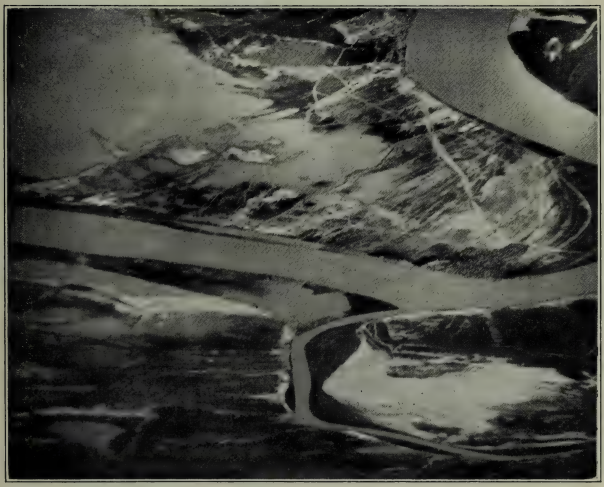

Kut, the day before surrender. (Photograph taken from British aeroplane.)

General Lake pointed out that the transfer of negotiations to himself would inevitably delay matters, as General Townshend was near Halil and General Lake was not, and therefore preliminary negotiations at any rate must be left to General Townshend; to help him General Lake would send Captains Herbert and Lawrence and Colonel Beach* if required. If removal to camp was insisted on, General Townshend should first destroy his guns and all useful stores and if possible block the fairway of the river by sinking a steamer and *mahailas*. General Townshend was told to stipulate also for immunity of the civil population if left in Kut or permission for them to proceed downstream.

At daybreak on the 28th General Townshend sent a letter to Halil Pasha saying that General Lake took the same view as he did that the immediate evacuation of his force from Kut into camp meant an unconditional surrender. As it appeared to him that his force, whose heroic defence Halil himself had commented on, deserved better terms from an adversary of Halil's qualities, General Townshend asked Halil to reconsider the matter and obtain Enver's concurrence as soon as possible. What he asked was that his force should be allowed to go free on parole, for which he would surrender his forty guns and pay £1,000,000. On the other hand if he was forced to surrender unconditionally he would break off negotiations, destroy all his guns and useful material, and there would be no question of payment of any money. In such a case it would be a sorry force that Halil would take prisoner; as General Townshend's doctors informed him that under such conditions twenty or thirty of his men would die daily, and by the end of the summer at least a quarter of his force would be dead. On the other hand, if permitted to return home, the majority would recover, though they would be unfit to fight for a year, and in any case they would be on parole not to fight against Turkey during the war.

General Townshend was however ready to meet Halil half way, and, if the latter would send a thousand tents, he would camp his force on dry ground near the fort, evacuating the town, except for sick and wounded who could only be moved to embark on board ship, on the understanding that Halil would send the *Julnar* with its supplies immediately and would guarantee that General Townshend's force should be released on parole to India as soon as possible. To settle the details General Townshend asked for a safe conduct for Colonel Beach and Captains Herbert and Lawrence.

* Head of the Intelligence at Force Headquarters.

During the day General Townshend got a reply in the following terms. Halil had already telegraphed to Enver Pasha an account of the negotiations and had asked for orders. He had just received Enver's reply, which he gave verbatim:

> "Dans une seule condition c'est à dire de nous livrer tout ce qu'il y a en personnes en bouches à feu et en matériaux de guerre et ce qui existe à Kut son excellence le général Townshend seul pour sa personne peut aller avec ses effets personnelles et avec son sabre ou il désire mais avec la condition qu'il donne parole d'honneur pour ne jamais combattre contre la Turquie et contre ses alliés pendant la durée complete de cette guerre. S'il renonce à cette condition qui est decisive rompez les negociations et continuez à votre devoir militaire et dites lui qu'il ne pourrait plus profiter à aussi la permission accordée à sa personne."

Halil said that he had done all he could and that the matter was no longer in his hands.* He was leaving that day for his headquarters. He continued saying that if General Townshend would hand over all fire-arms without destroying them he would promise not to use them against the British army and that such an arrangement would exercise a considerable influence towards a *rapprochement* between the two nations, which was as much desired by Turkey as by Great Britain. Finally he asked for a definite reply by 7 p.m.

General Townshend, telegraphing this letter to General Lake, asked for orders as rapidly as possible. The food question would be a near thing. His duty seemed clear to go into captivity with his force. Halil had shown Captain Morland of General Townshend's staff Enver's communication in which he said that the Turks did not want money and had lost 10,000 men over Kut.

General Townshend a little later made the further suggestion to General Lake that Colonel Beach and Captain Herbert should offer Halil £2,000,000 and an exchange of an equal number of Turkish combatants to allow the Kut garrison to go free on parole.†

Three hours later General Lake replied that he was asking sanction from London to expend the two millions, though Enver's reply did not hold out much chance of success, but

* According to German accounts Halil had recommended to Enver that the force should be allowed to go on parole.

† Permission to make this exchange had been received from London just after General Townshend had despatched his letter to Halil at daybreak on the 28th.

that Beach, Herbert and Lawrence would go out next day and start negotiations on these lines. If no answer was received or Halil's reply was unfavourable, General Townshend should destroy his guns, stores and wireless, sink *mahailas* and steamers in the way best calculated to block the fairway and then surrender. He should then warn Halil that, as General Lake was prepared to take over all the sick and wounded in Kut, he would incur a heavy responsibility if he kept them, being unable to guarantee them proper treatment and transport; and also that he was in honour bound to ensure and provide for the protection of the civil population of Kut who had been shut up there through no fault of their own.

At 11.40 a.m. on the 29th April, General Townshend telegraphed to General Lake that he had destroyed his guns and most of his munitions and had sent to Halil to say that he was ready to surrender. He was unable to hold out any more and must have food. The negotiations by Colonel Beach might affect the question of the garrison being released on parole, but could not at that stage affect the surrender in any way. In the letter he sent to Halil at 6 a.m. that day he had said that hunger forced him to surrender and he trusted Halil and the Turks to treat his force generously. He asked that food might be sent immediately; and he suggested that Halil's senior medical officer should come and see the state of many of the garrison. It would be the best course to let the sick and wounded go to India—they could be exchanged for an equivalent number of Turkish prisoners of war.

General Townshend then explained that he had been unable to block the fairway of the river. There was too great a volume of water to block the channel effectually; the *mahailas* were in a sinking condition and belonged to Arabs; the *Sumana* was of practically no use; and if he blocked the channel the *Julnar* would be unable to get up to his new camp with supplies. Halil had given him liberty to proceed himself on parole with his aide-de-camp and servants to Constantinople and had told one of his officers that the British troops of the garrison would all go together to some town in Asia Minor where the climate was good and the Indians would probably go to Baghdad and Mosul.

At 12.42 p.m. General Townshend telegraphed that a Turkish regiment was approaching the fort to take over the guards in Kut. His troops would commence going into camp near Shumran at 2 p.m. At 1 p.m. the wireless signalled "good-bye" and was then destroyed.

In " Mons, Anzac and Kut " Captain Herbert recounts the negotiations carried out by Colonel Beach, Captain Lawrence and himself. Halil said that the Arabs in Kut were Turkish subjects, not British, and although he said that he did not mean to do anything to them he would give no assurance regarding them. Arrangements were made in regard to exchanging sick and wounded from Kut with Turkish prisoners of war; and Halil asked that General Lake should send ships which Halil promised to return, to transport General Townshend and his men to Baghdad. This, however, Colonel Beach could not agree to without General Lake's orders, as the relieving force had, as it was, insufficient steamers to keep themselves supplied. Halil was angry that General Townshend had destroyed his guns, and he said he could have prevented it by bombarding Kut but he did not want to.

On the 1st May Halil sent a letter to General Lake agreeing to the exchange of the sick and wounded in Kut for an equivalent number of Turkish prisoners of war, unwounded and in good health, of certain units, which he specified.* He could not transport the garrison of Kut to Baghdad by river as he had not the coal, and he suggested that General Lake should supply the 2,000 tons he would require. He also said that General Lake could send rations for the garrison.

General Lake replied saying that he would send vessels to bring down the sick and wounded, whom he would exchange as desired. He was unable to supply the coal or send vessels to transport the prisoners to Baghdad,† and he reminded Halil of the assurances given to General Townshend that in case of surrender the Turks would feed, transport to Baghdad and pay the Kut garrison, which assurance both Generals Lake and Townshend had accepted as having been given in good faith.

This practically ended the negotiations.

The surrender of Kut was a sad termination to the project which had originally contemplated the capture of Baghdad. From first to last the operations had involved the British Empire in over 40,000 casualties, including those gone into captivity; and it was a bitter blow to British pride, even

* Halil would not accept any Arab soldiers.

† In this connection it is to be noted that Halil had said that in any case he could not agree to an armistice between his force and that under General Gorringe. In these circumstances General Lake felt that he would not be justified in jeopardising the situation of his own force, which was already suffering, owing to shortage of river transport, from lack of supplies and stores.

though the final catastrophe had been directly due to starvation. For the garrison, for many of whom it was to prove a tragedy indeed, it was a most distressing conclusion to the fine gallantry and endurance they had displayed in their past eighteen months' hard campaigning. Many of them had chafed and fretted at the inactive rôle they had been constrained to fill in Kut and they felt their fate all the more bitterly that their captors were a force whom they had invariably defeated when it came to fighting. For the relieving force it was hardly less mortifying, for they also felt that the enemy's fighting powers would not have stopped them had they not been confronted at the critical stages by physical obstacles which rendered their finest efforts useless. Their casualties alone show that they have no reason to reproach themselves.

On the 29th April the strength of the Kut garrison amounted to 13,309 of whom 3,248 were Indian non-combatant followers.* During the siege their total casualties had been 3,776, of whom 1,025 had been killed or died of wounds, 721 had died of disease, 2,446 had been wounded (including 488 who died of their wounds) and 72 were missing. A very large proportion of the missing were men of the 67th Punjabis, killed or captured at the fight near the bridge on the 9th December, and the remainder were probably deserters.

Among the civil population of the town 247 had been killed or died of wounds and 663 more had been wounded.

After the beginning of March the health of the garrison had gradually declined—the Indians, owing to their refusal at first to eat meat, suffered most—and from the beginning of April there was a rapid lowering of stamina, vitality, physical condition and health generally. When the surrender took place the whole garrison were in a very low state of health and were generally incapable of taking even half the amount of the exertion they were formerly used to.

On the 29th April there were 1,450 sick and wounded in hospital. Of these the worst cases, numbering 1,136, were exchanged and sent down the river from Kut. Some three months later another batch of sick men, 345 in number, was sent down from Baghdad. So that a total of close on 12,000

* *Combatants.*

British officers	277
Indian officers	204
British rank and file ..	2,592
Indian rank and file ..	6,988
	10,061

men, British and Indian, soldier and follower, went into captivity, where over 4,000 of them died, many under conditions and in circumstances which must for ever form a blot on the Turkish reputation.*

A Parliamentary report was published in November 1918 on the treatment of British prisoners of war in Turkey,† and although for reasons which it explains its figures cannot be accepted as entirely accurate, its information in other respects gives a very real idea of what many of the prisoners endured. The opening paragraph is best quoted at length :—

> "The history of the British prisoners of war in Turkey has faithfully reflected the peculiarities of the Turkish character. Some of these, at any rate to the distant spectator, are sufficiently picturesque; others are due to the mere dead weight of Asiatic indifference and inertia; others again are actively and resolutely barbarous. It has thus happened that at the same moment there have been prisoners treated with almost theatrical politeness and consideration, prisoners left to starve and die through simple neglect and incompetence, and prisoners driven and tormented like beasts. These violent inconsistencies make it very difficult to give a coherent and general account of the experience of our men. Almost any unqualified statement can be contradicted again and again by undoubted facts; and the whole subject seems often to be ruled by nothing but mere chance."

Although the Turks seemed incapable of seeing that any care was taken of the rank and file, they realised the necessity for concealing from the civilised world the results of their neglect. They alone among the combatant nations refused for nearly two and a half years to admit the principle of permitting neutral inspection of their prisoners' camps; and, even when they had admitted it, many months passed before they would allow it to be carried into practice. Their surgical and medical arrangements were primitive in the extreme, and their badly equipped and insanitary hospitals added to instead of alleviating the sufferings of the sick. Fortunately

* Of the British rank and file in captivity, 209 were exchanged, but more than 1,700, or over 70 per cent., died in captivity or have never been traced. Of the Indian rank and file about 1,300 are known to have died in captivity; between 1,100 and 1,200 escaped or were exchanged; the remainder were either repatriated or have been presumed to be dead. Exact statistics as to the number repatriated are not available. Captured Indians have returned to India by various routes and at various times, and even as late as January 1924 ex-prisoners were occasionally turning up in India.

† Cd. 9208.

for our prisoners, some of our own medical officer prisoners were able in some cases to attend to our own men, but in many cases they were not. The Turkish negligence to provide food and clothing, which were always in any case most difficult to obtain in Mesopotamia and Asia Minor, was directly responsible for many of the casualties. In other cases, death was largely due to the brutality of the Arab soldiery and inhabitants, who looted our men perpetually and habitually ill-treated them. The Turks had many years' experience of Arab methods, but they took little trouble to restrain them.

On the 29th April, when the Turks entered Kut, General Townshend was sick, General Melliss had been on the sick list for some days, and it fell to the lot of the next senior officer, General Delamain, to hand over Kut to the Turkish divisional commander.* On the whole, says General Delamain, the Turks behaved well, though some parties of British and Indians, including individuals in out of the way parts of the defensive area, had their property rifled by Turkish and Arab soldiers. Any such cases, however, when brought to the notice of the Turkish military authorities, were at once attended to and action taken to rectify matters or to prevent any recurrence.† Many of the inhabitants of the town, however, fared very badly at Turkish hands, several of those who had helped us being hanged. That and the next day the British force moved into camp at Shumran, many of them having to march, as there were insufficient steamers, and in their weakened state this caused much suffering, especially as the Turks gave them no rations till the 30th at Shumran, when they issued some Turkish biscuits.‡ General Melliss, who had insisted on leaving hospital and joining his men in camp, did what he could, with the assistance of Colonel Chitty,§ to alleviate conditions. But he soon fell ill again and the apathy of the Turks was too great to be overcome. There were no tents or shelters and many of the men, having no blankets or kits, suffered much from exposure to the sun. During the next few days Turkish and

* Curiously enough, in 1919, after the war, when General Delamain, then commanding the Burma Division, went to inspect the Turkish officer prisoner of war camps, the first Turkish officer he met was this same divisional commander.

† In this respect the impression gathered from the Parliamentary report quoted appears to be incorrect; and General Delamain's opinion is confirmed by that of Major Sandes ("In Kut and Captivity").

‡ About 4 inches in circumference and ⅜ inch thick, these were so hard that they could only be eaten after being steeped in water for several hours. The inadequacy of this fare, quite unsuitable for half-starved men, was the cause of many deaths.

§ Assistant Quartermaster-General, 6th Division.

Arab soldiers peddled dates, black bread and ration biscuits among the prisoners in exchange for boots and clothing which few of them could really spare. The Turks had no excuse for this neglect, as the *Julnar* with over 200 tons of British rations was in their possession. On the 2nd May the river steamer *Shurur* came up from General Lake with rations, but she was taken up to the Turkish camp and it was not till next day that some British and Indian rations from her were issued, giving the prisoners a good meal at last.

On the 3rd May General Townshend left Kut by steamer for Baghdad *en route* to Constantinople, which he reached on the 3rd June. Throughout his detention in Turkey he was very well treated.

The Turks insisted, in spite of many protests, on separating our officers from the rank and file, and on the 4th May the first batch of British and Indian officers were despatched by river to Baghdad, being followed a little later by the remainder. The further experiences of our officers compared favourably with those of the rank and file; and, as various personal accounts of them have been published, they need not be described here. Major Sandes sums up his experiences in "In Kut and Captivity" thus:—

> "I have come to the conclusion that the utter neglect—I will not say ill-treatment—frequently shown towards us officers by the Turks may be traced, not to ill-will, but to absolute apathy, dislike of responsibility and incompetence. Our captors were not cruel to us or even hostile to us, but in most cases simply left us alone and neglected all appeals for assistance, unless induced to take action by the presence of Germans or by the fear of punishment from a superior officer."

On the 6th May, when already nearly 300 of them had died since the surrender as a result of their privations, the rank and file started from Shumran on their march to Baghdad. The Turks had refused to listen to the requests of the officers that they should be allowed to remain with their men; but on their urgent representations, the Turks allowed some of the rank and file, considered unfit to march by the British, to be sent by river; and they agreed that the column should not be required to march for more than eight miles a day. This agreement was only kept for one day and the men were made to cover the remaining 100 miles or so in 8½ days, arriving, after a day's halt at Aziziya, at Baghdad on the 15th May, where they were marched through crowded streets for some

hours. The march itself was a nightmare. The Arab soldiery freely used sticks and whips to flog the stragglers on, and although in some cases they kept the promise given to the British officers that men who fell out from sickness would be put on camels and donkeys, many died by the roadside. Many men had neither boots nor waterbottles left, and at Aziziya the Turks were obliged to leave 350 of them, crowded together in miserable insanitary buildings, to follow later by river.

On arrival at Baghdad, General Delamain and Colonel Hehir, who with the other officers now realised what their men had to put up with and were full of anxiety as to their fate, managed to arrange that eleven of the British medical officers should remain at Baghdad for work among the sick rank and file. These medical officers, with such help as the Turkish doctors in Baghdad, badly equipped themselves with many thousand sick and wounded of their own to look after, could give, managed to relieve much suffering and saved many lives.* Some French sisters of charity and nuns also gave magnificent help; and the unceasing efforts of Mr. Brissell, the American Consul, in this respect also were invaluable.

Russian forces were at this time not far from Baghdad, and the Turkish authorities were very anxious to send the prisoners up country as soon as possible. Some 500 sick had to be left in Baghdad, but the remainder were sent off in batches, being packed into railway trucks for the first seventy miles to Samarra, where they had to begin their desert march. Of what followed the Parliamentary report speaks as follows:—

> "Their state of preparation for a march of five hundred miles, the health and strength and equipment which they possessed for withstanding one of the fiercest summers of the globe, can be pictured from what has been described already; and the efficiency of the Oriental care to which they were entrusted is as easily imagined. The officers who were left in Baghdad, and who watched them depart, could only feel the deepest anxiety and dread.
>
> "The truth of what happened has only very gradually become known, and in all its details it will never be known, for those who could tell the worst are long ago dead. But it is certain that this desert journey rests upon those

* The Parliamentary report points out that the Turkish medical officers here gave much sympathetic co-operation.

responsible for it as a crime of the kind which we call historic, so long and terrible was the torture it meant for thousands of helpless men. If it is urged that Turkish powers of organisation and forethought were utterly incapable of handling such a problem as the transport of these prisoners, the plea is sound enough as an explanation; as an excuse it is nothing. There was no one in the higher Turkish command who could be ignorant that to send the men out on such a journey and in such conditions was to condemn half of them to certain death, unless every proper precaution were taken. And there were precautions which were easy and obvious, the chief one being that the prisoners should not be deprived of the care for their health which their own officers could give them. Yet even this plain opportunity was sacrificed, as we have seen, with perfect indifference to the fate of the mere rank and file. Here, as always, we find that Turkish apathy is not as simple as it seems; it betrays considerable respect of persons, and it contrives to evade the most dangerous witnesses of its guilt."

After the first batch of men had left Baghdad, General Melliss and a few other British officers who had been sick left Baghdad for Asia Minor. Some extracts from the private diary of an officer of the party, which are given in Appendix XXIX, show some of their experiences.* One of General Melliss' communications mentioned in this diary reached the Turkish Commander-in-Chief at Baghdad, who sent a British medical officer with a hospital establishment to Samarra. Here they collected many of the men who had fallen out during the first few stages beyond Samarra, but many more had passed on out of reach. The Turks, however, sent subsequent parties of officers from Baghdad by another route; and the deduction drawn from this by the Parliamentary report is that they did so purposely to prevent any further discovery of what had happened. On arrival at Brusa General Melliss sent a full and detailed account of what he had himself witnessed to Enver Pasha, whom he earnestly besought to telegraph instructions that would ensure proper treatment of our men and save many lives. But it was of no avail, for Enver merely replied that having given orders for the proper treatment of our prisoners he could not believe that what General Melliss had reported was true.

* It is noteworthy that our men appear frequently to have met with kindness from the Germans they encountered.

On arrival at Ras al Ain, the railhead of the railway from Aleppo and about 370 miles by road from Samarra, many of the Indians were left there for railway construction work. The remainder and all the British were taken to the neighbourhood of Tarsus and Adana in Asia Minor and handed over for railway construction work to a German company. But their health broke down at once under the work, and by September 1916 they were handed back to Turkish custody, as it was hopeless to try and get work out of them. The Turks then decided to send them to camps in the interior, and their journey was in many ways a repetition of their former experiences. At first packed in railway wagons without food and then driven across the Taurus mountains, where there was a break in the line, by *gendarmes* with the butts of their rifles, many of them died. An Austrian officer who saw part of this journey likened it to a scene from Dante's Inferno.

Many of the sick and exhausted stragglers were, however, owing to the exertions of the American Consul at Mersina, brought to Adana and Tarsus, where, thanks to the care of American ladies and doctors, the lives of nearly half of those rescued were saved.

Once dispersed in various camps their condition as a general rule improved slightly.*

At Afiun Qarahisar, one of the camps, the men at first met with most brutal treatment from its Turkish commandant; but his flogging and treatment of prisoners became so notorious that the Turkish Government, under pressure, removed him early in 1917 and thenceforward conditions there gradually improved until they became good. Angora was another camp where at first the prisoners were very badly treated, but in the summer of 1917 they met with more consideration, although later on they suffered greatly from want of adequate clothing in the severe cold of winter. The report says that the men appear to have considerably impressed the Turks by their power of bearing up and adapting themselves to hard circumstances.

There were numerous working camps in and near the Taurus and Amanus mountains, where the main hardships were due

* Regimental Sergeant-Major Love of the 1st Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry writes in the Chronicle of that regiment :—

"In February 1917 we received our first parcels of food from England and from that time they came continuously at different times till our release in 1918. Words cannot express our grateful thanks to the ladies who worked so hard for the regiment in keeping us supplied with food and clothes. But for them very few would ever have reached home. During our last ten months we had no reason to complain, as our parcels arrived each month and we received money from the Consul."

to the violent extremes of heat and cold and where malaria was rife. The German and Austrian engineers in charge, although they did not always see that the men had sufficient clothing and food, generally treated the men well in other ways. Fortunately, the American consuls at Mersina and Aleppo intervened energetically and frequently, and thanks to their resource and enterprise the prisoners benefited considerably. In the summer of 1917 most of these camps shifted eastward. In the winter more British soldiers were concentrated at Angora, but there is little record of their conditions.

At Ras al Ain some hundreds of Indian prisoners passed a dreadful time, ravaged by sickness, ill-fed and overdriven until the first charitable help arrived from Aleppo in November 1916. An officer of the Indian Medical Service was there from the first, but in the lack of medicines and proper food it was inevitable that the death rate should be very high. Matters here also had improved much by the summer of 1917. It is to be noted that those of the Indian prisoners who were Mahomedans received different treatment from the others. Few of them were kept in confinement and almost without exception they were well treated, while many attempts were made to tamper with their loyalty. For instance, the Indian Mahomedan officers were presented to the Sultan at Constantinople and were given Turkish swords with permission to wear them, those who refused being placed under arrest.

In concluding this brief summary of the experiences of our prisoners it is very necessary to mention how much they and the Empire owe to the services of the United States Ambassadors at Constantinople* and, after that country had entered the war, to the Netherlands Minister.† These gentlemen were unceasing in their efforts to promote the prisoners' welfare and it was mainly due to the unending succession of representations they made to the Turkish Government, backed by all the weight of their personal influence, that the existence of the British and Indian prisoners of war in Turkey finally became tolerable.

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* Messrs. Morgenthau and Elkus.

† Monsieur de Willebois.

APPENDIX VIII.

The Present and Prospective Situation in Syria and Mesopotamia.

A Paper prepared by the General Staff in consultation with the Admiralty War Staff.

19th October, 1915.

At a Cabinet War Committee on the 14th October it was decided that this question should be discussed by the combined Staffs and a paper prepared, the following being the terms of reference :—

"The General Staff in consultation with the Admiralty War Staff to prepare a military appreciation of the present and prospective situation in Syria and Mesopotamia."

In considering the problems involved in Mesopotamia and Syria it is necessary to bear the following points in mind. Indian soldiers are immediately involved in the Mesopotamia expedition, and Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf are closely related politically to our Indian Empire. This expedition, which has arrived at a point within about fifty miles of Baghdad, has been organised and despatched by India, and it is India which would suffer most should the expedition meet with mishap. On the other hand, should some striking success be gained in this theatre of war—such as the capture of Baghdad and the domination of the great route leading thence into Persia—it would be India which would mainly gain thereby, although the Empire as a whole would also benefit.

The question of Syria is closely identified with our position in Egypt and the Suez canal, and the security of Egypt is also important as affecting our direct communications with India.

The position at the present time in Turkey in Asia is, expressing it in very general terms, that the bulk of the military resources of the Ottoman Empire drawn from this portion of it are massed round Constantinople and the Dardanelles, on the Caucasus frontier, and in Syria, with a relatively small force about Baghdad (*see* Annexure A). To reinforce any one of these bodies of troops from another inevitably means a great loss of time from the enemy's point of view owing to lack of communications and the great distance to be traversed. Of the four groups above mentioned by far the largest is that in the west about Constantinople and the Dardanelles. This, it is believed, amounts in round numbers to 350,000. The next biggest group is that on the Caucasus front, which numbers approximately 145,000. The force in Syria has been depleted latterly with the object of adding to the troops around the capital and in the Dardanelles, and it is not believed at the present time to mount up to more than 47,000 men, a certain number of whom are recruits. The force in Mesopotamia is approximately 9,000, excluding irregulars.

The most important communications in Turkey in Asia meet about the head of the Gulf of Iskanderun. The railway from the Sea of Marmara and the Ægean leading eastwards skirt this gulf and afterwards divert, one line running down to Syria and the other line, still very incomplete, leading towards Mesopotamia. There is no through railway connection either to Syria or in the direction of Mesopotamia, owing to the line not being finished at the Cilician Gates and to a further gap in the hills north of Alexandretta. This is a factor of great importance in considering the time required in moving troops from the west either to Syria or to Mesopotamia. It also to some extent affects the time taken in moving troops from the west to the Caucasus frontier. Owing to the topographical difficulties in Armenia and Kurdistan any movement of troops from the Caucasus front either in the direction of Mesopotamia or of Syria is bound to be a slow process ; routes are few, bad and far between, and all this high lying region is subject to intense cold in the winter months.

The strategical problem presented to the Turks and us in Syria and Mesopotamia must be to a considerable extent governed by the course of events in the Balkans and at the Dardanelles. In the conditions existing at the present moment few Ottoman troops could well be withdrawn from Thrace or the Dardanelles, or from the vicinity of Smyrna, owing to the uncertainty of the strategical position as it presents itself to the enemy. If on the other hand Austro-German forces were to reach Constantinople, or if the Allied position at the Dardanelles was abandoned, considerable Turkish forces, supplemented perhaps by Austro-German detachments, would be made available to operate elsewhere, and armaments and munitions could be pushed through into the heart of Asia Minor, where there is reason to believe that large detachments of recruits and young soldiers under training are available. The total number of these recruits and young soldiers is difficult to estimate, but they probably amount to quite 50,000 men and possibly to 100,000, and they would be centrally situated for movement either to Transcaucasia, to Syria, or to Mesopotamia.

For various reasons it seems unlikely that the Turks, under German guidance, would make use of large forces available for service in Asia to take part in the campaign in the Caucasus. Movement is difficult owing to the nature of the country, and there is no very clear object to be gained in that direction even assuming operations to be successful, unless the Russians should withdraw troops from Europe to meet such a menace, which is unlikely. It is far more probable that such forces as might be available would be employed against Egypt, or against Mesopotamia, or against both. Should the German General Staff decide on such operations, which in either case if successful would exercise an adverse influence throughout the British Empire in the East, the question of time and distance enters greatly into the calculation. It will be convenient to consider Syria and Mesopotamia separately.

The Syrian Problem.

In view of the gaps in the railway communications at the Cilician Gates and north of Aleppo, and also of the lack of rolling stock and of coal on the Anatolian and the Syrian railways, any large bodies of troops from about the Sea of Marmara or the Ægean might have to march to reach Syria. In Annexure B are given some notes on the railways affecting this problem. The distance from the Bosporus to the Egyptian frontier is 1,200 miles, but if the Germans succeeded in increasing the rolling stock on the stretch of railway between the Bosporus and the Cilician Gates—and this is doubtful—it might be possible to move troops by rail as far as that point. The distance from the Cilician Gates to the Egyptian frontier is 700 miles. It may be observed that there must be delay in bringing any large amount of rolling stock from Europe to Asia and that if this delay were considerable a movement of troops to the Cilician Gates might perhaps be carried out by road before the rolling stock could arrive. Unless means could be devised to transport the rolling stock across the gap the problem of maintaining troops operating far beyond that point would not be simplified as there appears to be, at present, sufficient rolling stock to bring up all supply and munition requirements to the gap from the west.

It has been calculated in a former paper that if the enemy's campaign against Serbia is successful, munitions and troops might arrive in Thrace within six weeks from the date of crossing the Danube, that is to say towards the end of November. For troops to march from the Bosporus to the Egyptian frontier would take about four months and it is therefore doubtful whether any large force from that quarter could arrive on the Egyptian frontier before the end of March. From Smyrna to the Egyptian frontier is also just about 1,200 miles, or a four months' march; there are about 75,000 troops available in Western Anatolia, and if these were set in motion towards the end of November a large portion of them might arrive on the Egyptian

frontier in the latter part of March. Troops using the railway as far as the Cilician Gates from Smyrna or the Bosporus would, however, reach their destination six weeks sooner. It would also be possible to move troops from the Caucasian frontier to Syria. From Erzerum to the Egyptian frontier is about 850 miles, which would mean a three months' march at least, owing to the difficulties of the road. Some of these troops could, however, be withdrawn at any time, and supposing they started now might be available for operations across the Sinai desert by the middle of January. Finally, there are the young soldiers at present unarmed in the centre of Asia Minor to be thought of. These would have to march about 750 miles, a two-and-a-half months' march, and it is doubtful whether they could be armed and equipped sufficiently to make them a fighting force until well on in December; that would mean that they might reach the Egyptian frontier early in March.

To sum up then. Suppose it was decided now by the enemy that an attempt should be made to reach the Canal, some troops from the Caucasus might reach the Egyptian frontier early in January, some newly formed troops from Asia Minor might possibly arrive towards the end of that month, and forces might be continuing to arrive from about Smyrna and the Bosporus up to the end of March, by which time a considerable army could undoubtedly be collected, provided there is sufficient rolling stock to supply it. This question of supply would be bound to exert a great influence over any attempt to invade Egypt in large force. There is no through communication from Anatolia, and the breaks in the lines at the Cilician Gates and near Aleppo would add enormously to the difficulties of bringing munitions and food from the Bosporus to the scene of action. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that this factor would exert a dominating influence over the size of the force detailed for the undertaking.

In considering the capabilities of the Syrian railway system, there are certain points which require to be specially noted. In the first place, while the line from north of Aleppo to Rayak (the junction east of Beirut) is normal gauge, the system to the south of that point is narrow gauge. This break of gauge would necessarily cause delay in the movement of either troops or stores. Then again, the carrying power of these lines is to some extent reduced by the lack of coal, although wood, which is practically unlimited, makes a fairly satisfactory substitute. Furthermore, the enemy's projects for an expedition against Egypt more or less hinge on the possibility of getting sufficient railway material through from Anatolia, to complete the line which is now being constructed to the Sinai desert. At present this only has the permanent way laid to a point some miles short of Beersheba and within sixty miles of the Egyptian frontier. The gaps at the Cilician Gates and north of Aleppo must necessarily delay the movement of this material, and there is no prospect whatever of the gap at the Cilician Gates being filled. It is calculated that a Turkish army of 100,000 men would require about 400 tons of supplies of all sorts per diem (half the amount required for a British army of the same strength), and that two trains per diem on normal gauge and three trains on narrow gauge would suffice for maintenance.

We arrive, then, at these conclusions. The enemy may be in a position to begin increasing his force in southern Palestine in the early days of next year, and to increase those forces very largely by the end of March if he can only feed them and supply them with munitions. The strength of the army of invasion of Egypt is not, in fact, likely to be limited by the time taken in getting the troops to the spot, nor by the numbers available in other portions of the Ottoman Empire for the enterprise, so much as by the question of keeping the army supplied. This problem of supply hinges upon the capabilities of the Syrian railways. It is, moreover, upon the capabilities of the Syrian railways that, to a great extent, depends the power of the enemy to extend the military railway, now in course of construction, on to the Syrian desert. For lack of data there is much that is uncertain in any calculation we can make as to what the railways can do. But one point at least is certain. If the Syrian railway system can be eliminated by military measures on our

part in the early future, it puts an end to any possibility of an attack in great strength upon Egypt from the side of Syria, and this brings us to the broad strategical problems which counter-measures on our part involve.

In Annexure C are given details as to the landing facilities along the coast. Given ample forces for the task, the most satisfactory and effective plan for putting an end to enemy attempts on a large scale against Egypt would be the landing of a formidable expeditionary force in the Gulf of Iskanderun and the cutting of all communication between the Cilician Gates on the west and Marash and Aleppo on the east. (This, it should be noted, is almost as effective an operation of war for guarding our position in Mesopotamia as for guarding our position in Egypt.) That accomplished, practically no troops, no supplies, no fuel and no railway material could reach Palestine from Anatolia; it would, moreover, be difficult for troops to reach Palestine from the Caucasian front and to supply them if they got there. From the naval point of view, operations at this point offer no great difficulties. Ayas bay on the north side of the gulf opposite Alexandretta is very well sheltered and could be made immune against enemy submarines. Alexandretta itself would make a satisfactory landing place for troops brought over from transports in Ayas bay. A military operation such as this on our part would on the other hand mean that the troops undertaking it would be exposed to attack from the side of Anatolia and also from that of Armenia and Kurdistan, and that they would be exposed to such attack pretty speedily, because they would be planting themselves down comparatively speaking near to where the bulk of the enemy forces now are. They would, further, have to occupy a considerable area. In a word, such an operation could only be undertaken by a large army, and that large army would have to remain if it was to fulfil its object. If a force could be pushed up very rapidly from Ayas bay to the Cilician Gates (80 miles) and could seize that strategic defile, it might be able to close this all-important route to the enemy's troops; but it is doubtful whether such an operation could be carried out before the opposing side had definitely secured the pass, even if the landing itself met with no serious opposition.

The Admiralty would be unable to undertake their share of a joint expedition to the Gulf of Iskanderun, while the Dardanelles operations are in progress.

Our sea power enables us to transport military detachments to a number of points along the Syrian coast, e.g., Latakia, Tripoli, Beirut, Haifa and Jaffa, the relative advantages of these localities as landing places necessarily varying considerably. Expressing the position in general terms, it may be said that the further south such an expedition forced a landing, the more time it would have to consolidate itself before the enemy would receive large reinforcements, while the further north it landed the more effectively it would be able to cut the Syrian railway system, and the more completely it could cut off Turkish forces now in Palestine from the rest of the Ottoman Empire.

But any project for undertaking military operations in Syria is necessarily governed primarily by naval considerations. The view of the Admiralty War Staff is that these conditions are adverse to military operations on any scale larger than that involved in mere raids. There is no anchorage along the Syrian coast like Ayas bay, where transports and warships can lie secure both from bad weather and hostile submarines. The only port where disembarkation of troops and stores could be carried out in all weathers is Beirut; this possesses an artificial harbour where small transports could discharge, but it is a harbour which could very easily be destroyed by the enemy and is only suited as a base for a force of a very few thousand men. Under favourable weather conditions, military landings might no doubt succeed at various points—about Acre and Haifa, for instance—at Jaffa and even possibly at Gaza. But the winter is coming on, and any one of these disembarkation operations might be interrupted at any moment. There are, moreover, grounds for believing that preparations for defence exist both at Beirut and at Haifa and that landings would be strongly opposed.

After careful consideration of the question, the Combined Staff are of opinion that a military expedition into Syria of sufficient strength to penetrate,

in face of opposition, as far as the Syrian railway system connecting Aleppo with the railhead near Beersheba, involves too hazardous and difficult an enterprise to justify the attempt being made. They realise that if such an operation were to be carried out successfully, it might be possible so far to destroy the railway, as to make it impracticable for large enemy forces to assemble on the Egyptian frontier before April, after which date the difficulties of the Sinai desert would make invasion of Egypt virtually impossible. But, alike on naval and military grounds, they feel compelled to pronounce against it. The Combined Staff have considered the question of a landing at Aqaba, which is a very favourable locality from a naval point of view. They are, however, of opinion that from the military point of view nothing would be gained by undertaking a desert campaign based on this point, in spite of the fact that such a campaign would threaten the communications of a hostile army that was advancing from Beersheba across the Sinai desert towards the Suez Canal.

The Combined Staffs are therefore of opinion that the Syrian problem—or in other words the problem of the defence of Egypt—for practical purposes presents only two alternatives :—

(1) The undertaking of military operations on an extensive scale based on the Gulf of Iskanderun.

(2) Defence of the line of the Suez Canal.

With reference to the first alternative, that of operations based on the Gulf of Iskanderun, the Combined Staffs fully realise that a successful campaign in this quarter might render impossible any attempt on the part of the enemy on a large scale to attack Egypt. It might also render it impossible for the enemy to push down in the direction of Mesopotamia the munitions and the railway material, without which our antagonists must find it very difficult to imperil our position at Baghdad or Kut al Amara. The Combined Staffs have not had time to work out a detailed plan of campaign in the suggested theatre of operations. They are satisfied, however, that it could not be undertaken by a force of less strength than 100,000 men, and that an even larger army would probably be necessary. They are moreover satisfied that if this army were once committed to the enterprise, it would cease to be available for action against the one enemy whose overthrow can bring this war to a successful conclusion—Germany.

Against the second alternative it may be argued that it would leave the enemy free to organise and complete a long and difficult movement along a line which, throughout the greater part of its length, is within striking distance of the sea. Despite this fact, however, the balance of military advantage appears to be distinctly more in favour of defending Egypt on the Canal than in seeking to prevent the enemy from reaching the Canal. From what has already been said it is evident that any operations on the Syrian coast can only be of a minor nature, and at best would have little chance of effecting more than a temporary delay. Operations from Iskanderun would have to be on a great scale, and would have to be taken in hand at once ; they might entail the forcing of a landing against considerable opposition, and in any case they would probably involve us in a fight with larger Turkish forces than are at all likely to be able to reach the Canal. In the event of failure our withdrawal would be very difficult, while the enemy if defeated could retire with comparative ease.

We can reach the Canal more easily, quickly and certainly than the enemy can. He cannot bring such a large force against us. We should have the advantages of the tactical defensive, carefully prepared, and the army and navy can co-operate in it. If we were defeated we have room to manoeuvre. If the enemy were defeated he would be in a dangerous situation. We can force him to detach to guard his line of communication. We can operate against it if he is in retreat more effectively than when he is advancing. Moreover, during the time taken by the enemy to reach the vicinity of the Canal we, with our sea power, can make full preparations in respect to artillery defence and so forth to meet the attack. The troops detailed to guard Egypt

would serve to subdue the Senussi and any hostile elements in or to the west of the Nile delta during the period intervening before the development of the attack; the Admiralty could add to their naval forces now in Egyptian waters while Dardanelles operations are in progress. In the view of the Combined Staffs the second alternative seems to be that which should be adopted.

The Mesopotamian Problem.

Many of the factors bearing on the Syrian problem bear also upon the Mesopotamian problem. The bulk of the fighting forces of the Ottoman Empire are at present about the Dardanelles, about Constantinople, and in western Anatolia, and to move these to Mesopotamia they have almost inevitably to move by the Cilician Gates and to pass near the head of the Gulf of Iskanderun. Until they reach the vicinity of Aleppo they encounter the difficulties that the same troops would encounter supposing that they were proceeding to Syria. On the other hand, once they arrive near Aleppo, the problem of moving them on to Mesopotamia is a different one from that of moving them to Palestine. Moreover, portions of the considerable force now gathered in the Caucasus theatre of war can reach Mosul on the Tigris two or three weeks sooner than they could reach the vicinity of Aleppo, as the distance is shorter by from 200 to 250 miles.

The question for consideration in respect to Mesopotamia may almost be said to be confined to the issue at Baghdad and its environs. *Can Baghdad be occupied in the early future, and, if occupied, can it be held until the present war comes to an end?* The desirability, or otherwise, of a raid on the city may for the moment be left out of consideration. As already stated (and as shown in Annexure A) the Turkish force at present only comprises about 9,000 regulars, whose experiences hitherto have been discouraging. These are assisted by some thousands of irregulars. The attitude of the Arabs along the lines of communication from the Persian Gulf to the vicinity of Baghdad must always be a somewhat uncertain factor. But it seems that the occupation of Baghdad within the next few weeks should be a perfectly feasible operation. The question is not one of getting there, but one of remaining there, and the problem to be examined is not so much what the opposing belligerents can effect in this theatre of war at the present moment, as what the belligerents can effect from December next up to the end of the present war.

To begin with the enemy. As the question of communications stands at present, the forces which the Turks, possibly supplemented by German detachments, could bring to bear in the direction of Baghdad is limited by the very unsatisfactory character of the communications leading thither from the heart of the Ottoman Empire. From Aleppo the railway has been completed as far as Ras al Ain, while at the other end the line from Baghdad has been completed to Samarra. But between Ras al Ain and Samarra there is a gap of approximately 373 miles. The question of how many troops the Turks could maintain near Baghdad is gone into in some detail in Annexure D, and it is there shown that it is doubtful whether at present more than 60,000 could be so maintained.

In discussing the problem of Syria, it has been pointed out that the approaches of enemy forces and war material from Western Anatolia, alike to Syria and to Mesopotamia, might be barred by the operations of a large army landing in the Gulf of Iskanderun. Failing this, we are faced with the possibility of having to deal near Baghdad with a force of 60,000 Turks, and with the possibility that in the course of some months this force might be augmented by German organising power and enterprise.

There seems to be little likelihood of the enemy's present forces in this quarter being appreciably reinforced for a good many weeks to come. From the Caucasian front to Baghdad is approximately 550 miles, traversed by bad routes; Turkish troops quitting Erzerum now could hardly reach their

destination before the beginning of next year. The distance from Aleppo is about the same as that from Erzerum, and troops leaving Western Anatolia now, and using the railway to the Cilician Gates, could hardly arrive before the end of January if they marched from Aleppo. It is possible to float troops down the Euphrates on improvised rafts, and detachments might arrive during December if they adopted this route · but it would be difficult to move any large force by this means. An examination of the subject, in fact, leads to the conclusion that, for about two months from the present time, there is little likelihood of the enemy receiving any considerable accession to his strength, and that no really formidable reinforcements would be likely to join before the latter part of January, if then.

The problem with which Sir J. Nixon is faced, therefore, is that he has only 9,000 Turkish troops and some irregulars to deal with during the next two months, that these enemy forces may be somewhat increased by the end of the year, and that they might conceivably reach a total of as much as 60,000 by the end of January. Political experts seem to be agreed as to the probable ill effects on our prestige in the East to be expected from a retirement, and we have also to bear in mind the possibility of larger enemy forces than 60,000 men being brought into play during the course of 1916 should the railway make good progress towards Mesopotamia.

In Annexures E and F are given the present strength and distribution of the forces under Sir J. Nixon and a naval appreciation of the situation in Mesopotamia. It is obvious that the forces now at Sir J. Nixon's disposal, supplemented by naval assistance, could not be expected to prove capable of holding Baghdad and the vicinity against a hostile army 60,000 strong. Nor would the addition of a single Indian division to the troops under his command provide him with the strength necessary to make his position at Baghdad reasonably secure. If reinforced by a further Indian division, allowing of his maintaining three divisions at the front and one on his line of communications, he might perhaps be looked upon as strong enough to accept the risk in view of the invaluable support which he could count upon from the naval river flotilla. But there always remains the possibility of the enemy at a later date receiving reinforcements, and in this case an Indian army of four divisions could not make certain of maintaining itself against hostile efforts.

If a large Allied army were to be landed in the Gulf of Iskanderun, as has been considered above, it can fairly be assumed that the interruption caused in the enemy's communications would suffice to prevent more than 60,000 men being employed against Sir J. Nixon, who, consequently, should be able to maintain himself at Baghdad provided that he could be reinforced before the end of the year by two more Indian divisions—making a total of four. As the Combined Staffs understand the political aspects of the question, the effect on our prestige in the East would be considerable.

If an Allied army is not landed in the Gulf of Iskanderun, the Combined Staff consider that it would be unwise from their point of view to occupy Baghdad with the intention of staying there until the end of the war, but they would favour a raid, even if the raiding force were not withdrawn immediately, provided it remained entirely within the power of the military authorities to withdraw the troops at will.

A strong argument in favour of temporarily occupying Baghdad is the probability that a failure to push on now might create nearly, if not quite, as bad an impression in the East as would a withdrawal after occupation. But if there are such strong political objections to a withdrawal from Baghdad —after having once gone there—as to make it in the least doubtful whether the military authorities would be permitted to withdraw the troops at their discretion, however desirable it might be to do so on military grounds, then the opinion of the Combined Staff is definitely against either occupation or raid.

The Combined General Staff wish to add that whatever decision may be come to in regard to Mesopotamia and whatever force it may be decided to employ in this theatre of war, they regard it as imperative that this force should continue to be a purely Indian force, and that India should accept

all responsibility for its reinforcement, which is certain to prove a very serious drain on resources in personnel, and for its maintenance until such time as peace has been proclaimed. They realise that this is an Indian affair, and they realise that troops can be devoted to the purpose which could not profitably be employed elsewhere. That being the case, operations in this theatre do not sin against what is a fundamental principle of the art of war—the principle that, if victory is to be achieved, fighting resources must be concentrated at the decisive point. But they wish to insist upon the importance of this: that under no circumstance must troops, which might otherwise be employed in Europe, be diverted from the primary theatre of war for the purpose of conducting a campaign which cannot appreciably influence the decision as between the armies of the Allied and those of the Central Powers.

H. B. JACKSON, *Admiral,*
First Sea Lord.

A. J. MURRAY, *Lieut.-General,*
Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

19*th October*, 1915.

ANNEXURE A.

Distribution of the Turkish Army.

(Exclusive of unarmed and partly-trained recruits.)

Gallipoli	130,000
Thrace	150,000
Western Anatolia	75,000
Konia, Smyrna, Adana, Black Sea Coast	50,000 (?)
Syria and Palestine	47,000
Caucasus	145,000
Mesopotamia (exclusive of irregulars)	9,000
Hejaz, Asir and Aden district	28,000
Total	634,000

ANNEXURE B.

Notes on Railways.

Haidar Pasha to Beersheba (believed to be present railhead).—Distance approximately 1,320 miles.

No rail communications likely to be open for two years yet between Karapunar and Dorak.

Cilician Gates.—The unfinished section through the Cilician Gates is approximately 20 miles long. The Bagtsche tunnel north of Aleppo is pierced, but only a Decauville railway is running through at present. Rolling stock is probably inadequate for more than three or four trains a day on other sections. Coal will have to be brought down from Hungary to feed the lines.

The extension from Beersheba to the Canal will take at least 3½ months to construct (distance 150 miles as the crow flies, 220 miles by road).

Railway material cannot begin to reach Beersheba much before the beginning of December. The railway extension to Suez Canal might be completed by the 15th March. The railway will be almost completely taken up with the transport of ammunition, railway material, guns and coal after the Germans have opened railway communication with Constantinople, and therefore not available for troop movement after (say) the 21st November.

Aleppo–Ras al Ain line (to Baghdad).—Trains are running as far as Ras al Ain from Aleppo; 373 miles of line between Ras al Ain and Samarra has yet to be completed. From Samarra the line is completed to Baghdad.

ANNEXURE C.

Operations in Syria.—Notes by Admiralty War Staff.

1. *The General Objective.*—To stop a force advancing :—
   (*a*) From Constantinople towards Aleppo.
   (*b*) From Syria towards Aleppo.
   (*c*) From Aleppo towards Egypt.

2. The strategic point which, if held, would control all or any of these movements, would be the junction of the railway lines near Aleppo, but this would involve the employment of an expeditionary army so great that it is probably out of the question—both from a military and naval point of view.

3. Large forces would be required to take up and hold positions on the roads and railways in sufficient strength to bar the passage of a large army advancing from Constantinople with Baghdad or Egypt as objective.

4. The only other operation which might be undertaken would be the landing of large raiding parties with the object of destroying the railway lines at different points, and then re-embarking again.

5. The Admiralty War Staff consider that it would be very unwise to repeat the experience we have undergone, and are now suffering from, of trying to keep an army supplied with stores, and to undertake embarkations and landing of troops on a beach or at a port which can be shelled by the enemy from surrounding heights and is open to submarine attack, and is of the opinion that before any expedition is agreed to, the army should be practically certain of holding sufficient ground to give immunity from attack by the enemy's artillery.

6. From figures obtained from the Director of Supplies at the War Office, it appears that, for an army of 100,000 men, it would require, as an "initial" amount of stores to be landed with the army, a total weight of approximately 25,000 tons (dead weight), or 38,000 shipping tons.

At Salonika—which has far more facilities as a landing port than any to be found in Asia Minor (except Smyrna) or Syria—it is found that whilst troops are being landed, only about 200 tons a day can be handled, in addition to the filled wagons accompanying the force.

For the navy to supply such an army on a beach or in any ill-equipped port would, therefore, appear to be an impossible undertaking.

7. As a force of less than 100,000 men would apparently be useless for carrying out either of the projects mentioned in paras. 2 and 3, there only remains the operation of landing raiding forces for damaging railway plant and lines—as mentioned in para. 4.

This would be a feasible operation from the naval point of view, if the General Staff decided that it was worth while to carry out such a scheme.

It is assumed that a raiding force which was only to make a flying visit to the shore, would not require the same amount of stores, etc., which an army regularly advancing with cavalry, etc., would require, and that the weights, as given in para. 6, would be considerably reduced. (The Admiralty War Staff would be glad of information on this point.)

8. The whole extent of the coast of Syria is singularly devoid of natural harbours—Ayas bay in the Gulf of Iskanderun being the only really sheltered anchorage for large ships on the coast. Beirut, however, affords an excellent roadstead for nine months out of the twelve, and, with due precaution, for the whole year round, as the winds seldom blow home.

Ayas Bay.—This bay, being fairly well sheltered, might be used as a base anchorage for transports and supply ships, but the mountains rise to 2,000 feet within 3½ miles from the shore, and afford commanding positions for artillery. Shoal water extends for some considerable distance from the shore, and the beach is therefore not a very convenient one. There are no piers or other facilities for landing stores and such would have to be constructed. It could be easily protected against submarines.

Alexandretta.—A safe and secure anchorage, though not so well protected as Ayas bay. It is subject to strong north-easterly gales in the winter months. There is no artificial harbour, nor any facilities for landing purposes, except a few small piers with shallow water at their extremities. It would be most difficult to protect against submarines owing to the depths of water and that there is no protection for the vessels supporting the nets. High mountains lie close behind the coast, and marsh land extends inland from the beach.

From a political standpoint, Alexandretta was a very desirable place to take—and retain. Now it would be a formidable undertaking.

Beirut.—An open roadstead with fairly good holding ground. It is difficult to defend against submarines, the 20-fathom line being reached at only 8 cables from the shore, and there being no protection for the vessels supporting the nets.

There is an artificial harbour into which ships of 400 feet drawing 26 feet of water can enter. Probably four or five could be accommodated. There are two moles where ships of not more than 21 feet draught can discharge cargo. For discharging the larger vessels lighters are used. There is a railway on the quay. On the whole, this is the best and most convenient landing place from the naval point of view.

The remaining places on the coast are open roadsteads without any facilities, difficult of protection, exposed to weather, and unsuitable.

Bay of Acre.—The anchorage off Acre is an open roadstead where ships could not remain in winter during strong westerly winds. It is exposed to winds from the N.N.E. to S.S.W.

All cargo would have to be transhipped into lighters—which would have to be brought—and it would only be possible to discharge ships during off-shore winds. The depths in the Ancient Port are only suitable for small coasting craft, and there are no facilities. Few lighters could be unloaded at a time. Submarine protection by means of temporary nets could be provided in fine weather, but it would not survive westerly weather. Acre would come under fire from hills about 4½ miles inland beyond the flat plain, and any position in the vicinity of Acre would be commanded by these hills.

Haifa in the south-west corner of the Bay of Acre is a much better anchorage, but it is quite exposed to the north-west, and ships cannot rely on remaining at anchor except in the summer months.

Submarine protection would be less difficult than off Acre, but would have to be of a temporary nature in the winter. There is more protection than off Acre, and lighters could be worked alongside ships when it would not be possible off Acre. Cargo would have to be landed from lighters, which would have to be brought; there are small quays with about 6 feet of water alongside. A few well-placed guns on Mount Carmel would make the bay untenable, unless the mount were captured and held, which, from the nature of the ground, would be a difficult operation, as ships' gunfire would not be of much assistance.

ANNEXURE D.

The Maintenance of a Turkish Force in Mesopotamia.

1. The Turkish forces in Mesopotamia have never probably exceeded 35,000. The force has gradually dwindled to 9,000 men, and no fresh divisions have been reported at any time as arriving in this theatre from elsewhere.

It is probable that supply difficulties, and more especially a lack of river craft, have set limitations on the size of the force acting in this area.

2. The existing lines of supply are :—

River Tigris;

River Euphrates.

The Samarra–Baghdad railway, about 60 miles in length, can hardly be regarded as a line of supply, as it is believed that the only rolling stock on it is for construction purposes.

The Aleppo–Baghdad line can at present be used only as far as Ras al Ain (200 miles from Mosul and 530 by road and river from Baghdad).

The uncompleted portion between Ras al Ain and Baghdad is 373 miles. It is unlikely that this portion could be laid in less than 12 months from now.

3. We have no details of river craft on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, but experience early in the war demonstrated that the river passage for troops and stores from Jerablus to Baghdad averaged one month.

4. If the Anatolian and Adana sections of the Baghdad railway were properly organised their capacity could probably be increased to four trains a day, say 600 tons of supplies and ammunition; but certainly for the next two years this would have to be conveyed by motor lorries across the Cilician Gates and (for the present) across the Amanus.

Six hundred tons would necessitate a service of say 200 lorries at Karapunar and 100 at Raju.

It becomes entirely a question of river transport. The stores could be packed in floating cases, each of which would be carried on a railway truck, or material for building light pontoons be brought by rail and pontoons constructed on the river bank. These would not return up river. Supposing 32 of these could be constructed, loaded and launched daily* and that each had a capacity of 5 tons, a total amount of 160 tons per diem could be sent down stream. This would suffice for a British force of 30,000 men, and therefore, perhaps, for a Turkish force of 60,000 men.

5. The supplies might be forwarded by train as far as Ras al Ain, and conveyed thence by motor lorries to Mosul (200 miles) for river transport to Baghdad, but it is improbable that more supplies could be dealt with daily by this route than via Jerablus and River Euphrates.

6. Though the railways, if organised, would be capable of feeding an army of at least 150,000 men at Aleppo, it does not appear that a force much larger than 60,000 men can be supplied in Mesopotamia until the railway between Ras al Ain and Samarra has been completed, a matter of at least 12 months.

ANNEXURE E.

India Expeditionary Force "D" is directly under Commander-in-Chief, India; consequently no strength returns are received in London :—

The Force consists of :—

2 Indian Infantry Divisions.
1 Cavalry Brigade (3 regiments of 3 squadrons each).
Corps Troops (1 regiment of Cavalry, 1 Pioneer battalion).

The Artillery includes :—

1 Battery, Royal Horse Artillery.
1 Brigade, Royal Field Artillery.
1 Brigade, Indian Mountain Artillery.
2 Batteries, Royal Garrison Artillery (Heavy).
1 Howitzer Battery, Territorial Force.
1 Battery, Volunteer Artillery.

The strength is estimated at about :—

23,000 fighting men of all arms.

DISTRIBUTION.

Posts.	Garrisons.
Fao (Shatt al Arab)	½ company Infantry.
Basra (Shatt al Arab)	2 battalions Infantry.
Qurna (Junction Euphrates and Tigris)	½ battalion Infantry.
Nasiriya (Euphrates)	3 battalions Infantry; 1 Mountain Battery.

* A very difficult task even for the Germans in this region.

Qala Salih (Tigris)	1 battalion Infantry.
Amara (Tigris)	½ battalion Infantry; 1 section Royal Garrison Artillery (Heavy); four guns (Volunteer Battery); 1 Mountain Battery.
Ali Gharbi (Tigris)	1 Infantry Brigade. Two guns (Volunteer Artillery).
Kut al Amara and above (Tigris) ..	6th Division. 2½ regiments Cavalry. 10th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery. Howitzer Battery, Territorial Force. Heavy Brigade, Royal Garrison Artillery (less 1 section). 1 Battery, Royal Horse Artillery.
Abadan (Karun)	½ company Infantry.
Ahwaz (Karun)	1 regiment Cavalry of 3 squadrons.
Band-i-Qir (Karun)	
Bushire (Persian Gulf)	1 squadron Cavalry. 2 battalions Infantry. Five captured Turkish guns.

Communications:—

Fao to Basra (Shatt al Arab), 66 miles
Basra to Baghdad (via River Tigris), 502 miles .. ..
} Total length of line of communications from Fao–Baghdad is 568 miles by river and less by road.

Nasiriya to Basra, 115 miles (River Euphrates).
Nasiriya to Kut al Amara, 120 miles (Shatt al Hai).
Mohammerah to Band-i-Qir, 100 miles (Karun River).

ANNEXURE F.

Operations in Mesopotamia.—Notes by Admiralty War Staff.

The situation in Mesopotamia is almost entirely a military problem to be dealt with mainly by the War Office and India Office.

The navy is concerned but to a very limited degree in operations undertaken in that part of the world; its larger ships cannot afford any direct assistance or support to the army in the field, and the service of providing local transport for troops and supplies which usually falls to the navy in combined operations, is, in this particular case, performed by river steamers and other hired craft under the direction of the Indian military authorities.

The work which the navy is called upon to perform consists of:—

1. The safe transport of troops from Europe or Egypt to Basra.
2. The efficient patrol of the River Tigris by armed gunboats and other small shallow-draught craft.
3. Limited assistance in air service by provision of a few machines and pilots.

As regards 1.—The Admiralty is prepared to provide transport for an army of one or two divisions from France or Egypt to Basra.

It is impossible to give an estimate of the time, from the receipt of the order to undertake the move, which would be required to convey to, and disembark the force at, Basra. This would depend on what other moves were being made by the transport service at the time, and on the strength and nature of the force to be moved.

The estimated length of the voyage from Marseilles to Basra is 22 days, and from Egypt to Basra, 14 days.

It should be noted that unless ample warning were given, the Indian troops would have to use the existing accommodation, as fitted in the ships.

2. No interference with our transports or supply ships is apprehended by enemy vessels in the Persian Gulf and Shatt al Arab. The Admiralty War

Staff considers this traffic to be sufficiently protected by His Majesty's ships now on the station, viz. :—

Light Cruisers.—
"*Juno*": eleven 6-inch, nine 12-pounders, and two maxims.
"*Pyramus*": eight 4-inch, eight 3-pounders, and three maxims.

Sloops.—
"*Clio*": six 4-inch, four 3-pounders, and three maxims.
"*Odin*": four 4-inch, four 3-pounders, and three maxims.
"*Espiègle*" (refitting): six 4-inch, four 3-pounders, and two maxims.

Gunboats.—
"*Bramble*" }
"*Britomart*" } two 4-inch, four 12-pounders, and four maxims.

R.I.M.S.—
"*Lawrence*": four 4-inch, four 6-pounders, and four nordenfelts.
"*Dalhousie*": six 6-pounders.
"*Northbrook*": two 12-pounders, and two 3-pounders.

Depot Ship.—
"*Alert.*"

For the patrol of the rivers above Basra.—Twelve armed shallow-draught river gunboats are in course of construction at Abadan.

The characteristics of these vessels are :—

Armament—two 4-inch guns, six maxims.
Speed—9 knots.
Draught—2 feet.
Radius of action—900 miles.

They have steam engines and oil-fired boilers, and are fitted with W/T and searchlights.

The first of these gunboats will be ready for commission about the middle of November, and the remainder are expected to be completed at monthly intervals.

In addition to these gunboats, the following armed small vessels are actually in service on the rivers :—

Six armed launches, carrying two nordenfelts.
Four shallow-draught stern-wheel steamers, armed with 3-pounder guns.

The stern-wheel steamers "*Mejidieh*" and "*Blosse Lynch*," used for transporting troops, under the direction of the military authorities, are armed with two 18-pounder guns, and presumably the "*Malamir*" and "*Salimi*"—vessels of the same type—are, or may be, similarly armed.

As no difficulty appears to have been experienced in guarding the river with the armed launches and steamers now employed, the Admiralty War Staff considers that, with the addition of the river gunboats now completing, the safety of the communications can well be assured as far as Baghdad—or even for a short distance beyond that city.

3. *Air Service.*—The naval seaplane base at Basra consists of :—

Three "Short" seaplanes—150-h.p. Sunbeam engines.
One "Sopwith" seaplane—100-h.p. Gnome.

Pilots.—Four officers (including squadron commander in command), 1 warrant officer, 21 ratings. In addition, 2 officers, 7 ratings are being sent out.

APPENDIX IX.

Composition on 14th November 1915 of Major-General C. V. F. Townshend's column, advancing on Baghdad.

Cavalry :—

Headquarters, 6th Cavalry Brigade.
" S " Battery, R.H.A.
7th Lancers (4 squadrons).
16th Cavalry (3 squadrons).
33rd Cavalry (3 squadrons).

One squadron, 23rd Cavalry. (Divisional Cavalry).
Total—11 squadrons and 6 guns.

Artillery:—

10th Brigade, R.F.A. (63rd, 76th and 82nd Batteries).
1/5th Hants Howitzer Battery.
86th Heavy Battery, R.G.A. (one section in barges).
104th Heavy Battery, R.G.A. (less one section).*
One post gun, Volunteer Artillery Battery.*
Total—29 guns (of which 3 guns were to be left with the garrison at Aziziya).

Infantry :—

16th Brigade (Dorsets, 66th Punjabis, 104th Rifles, 117th Mahrattas).
17th Brigade (Oxfords, 22nd Punjabis, 103rd Mahrattas, 119th Infantry).
18th Brigade (Norfolks, 7th Rajputs, 110th Mahrattas, 120th Infantry).
30th Brigade (2/7th Gurkhas, 24th Punjabis†, 76th Punjabis).
48th Pioneers.
Total—16 battalions (of which half a battalion was to be left in garrison at Aziziya).

Divisional Troops, etc. :—

Maxim Battery.
17th Field Company, Sappers and Miners.
22nd Field Company, Sappers and Miners.
Bridging Train.
Searchlight Section.
Divisional Ammunition Column.
34th Divisional Signal Company.
One brigade section, 12th Divisional Signal Company.
One section, Army Corps Signal Company.
One wagon wireless station.
Two pack wireless stations.
Field Ambulances.
Clearing Hospitals (on the " *Blosse Lynch* " and " *Mosul*").

Air Service :—

Five aeroplanes, Royal Flying Corps (including two converted naval seaplanes). Two more aeroplanes arrived on the 17th November.

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* To be left with garrison at Aziziya. One section of the 104th Battery was at Amara.
† Half the 24th Punjabis were to be left as garrison at Aziziya.

APPENDIX X.

Distribution on 14th November 1915 of the British force in Mesopotamia under General Sir John Nixon, excluding the troops under the command of Major-General C. V. F. Townshend on the Tigris above Kut.

At Kut al Amara.

Headquarters, Inspector-General Communications.
Half battalion, 2nd Royal West Kent Regiment (due from Nasiriya on 17th November).
67th Punjabis.
One section, 23rd Mountain Battery.
Two guns, Volunteer Artillery Battery.
Sirmur Sapper Company (due on 15th November).
One wagon wireless station.
Supply and medical units.

At Ali Gharbi.

One company, 20th Punjabis.
One gun, Volunteer Artillery Battery

At Amara.

Headquarters, 12th Division.
12th Divisional Signal Company (less two brigade sections).
Headquarters, Wireless Squadron.
One wagon wireless station.
23rd Mountain Battery (less two sections).
One section, 104th Heavy Battery, R.G.A.
Three guns, Volunteer Artillery Battery.
12th Company, Sappers and Miners (less one section).
33rd Infantry Brigade { Headquarters; 1/4th Hampshire Regiment; 20th Punjabis (less detachments at Ali Gharbi and Qala Salih).
Medical units.
Veterinary hospital.

At Qala Salih.

25 rifles, 20th Punjabis.

At Qurna.

43rd Erinpura Regiment (less three companies).

At Nasiriya.

12th Infantry Brigade { 2nd Royal West Kent Regiment (less half battalion); 44th Merwara Infantry; 90th Punjabis.
Brigade section, 12th Divisional Signal Company.
One squadron, 33rd Cavalry.
30th Mountain Battery.
Four guns, Volunteer Artillery Battery.
One section, 12th Company, Sappers and Miners.
One pack wireless station.
Three sections of a field ambulance.

At Akaika.

One company, 43rd Erinpura Regiment.

At Basra.

One section, 23rd Mountain Battery.
4th Rajputs (33rd Brigade).
Army Corps Signal Company (less one section).
Base depots.
Aviation depot.
Medical units.

In Arabistan.

At Ahwaz
- One squadron, 23rd Cavalry.
- Half battalion, 43rd Erinpura Regiment.
- Two sections of a field ambulance.

At Band-i-Qir. Headquarters and two squadrons, 23rd Cavalry.

At Bushire.

One squadron, 16th Cavalry.
11th Rajputs.
96th Infantry.
Three 7-pounder guns and four captured Turkish guns (with Indian mountain artillery detachment).

APPENDIX XI.

Effective strengths of combatant units of Major-General C. V. F. Townshend's force in front of Ctesiphon on 21st November 1915.

Unit.	Officers.		Other ranks.		Grand Total.	Rifles.	Sabres.	Guns.	Machine Guns.
	British.	Indian.	British.	Indian.					
H.Q. 6th Division	18	—	33	5	56	—	—	—	—
Column A.									
H.Q. 16th Infantry Brigade	3	—	11	8	22	—	—	—	—
2nd Dorsetshire ..	20	—	537	—	557	537	—	—	2
104th Rifles	10	14	—	687	711	687	—	—	2
24th Punjabis (½ batt.)	7	9	—	326	342	326	—	—	2
66th Punjabis.. ..	12	17	—	742	771	742	—	—	2
2/7th Gurkhas ..	10	14	—	660	684	660	—	—	2
117th Mahrattas ..	8	18	—	604	630	604	—	—	2
30th Brigade Signal Section..	1	—	11	15	27	—	—	—	—
22nd Company, S. & M. (*a*) ..	4	3	1	186	194	94	—	—	—
82nd Battery, R.F.A... ..	3	—	139	27	169	—	—	6	—
1/5th Hants Howitzer Battery	3	—	108	41	152	—	—	4	—
						3,650	—	10	12
Column B.									
H.Q. 18th Infantry Brigade	3	—	2	1	6	—	—	—	—
2nd Norfolk	23	—	531	—	554	531	—	—	2
7th Rajputs	10	16	—	663	689	663	—	—	2
110th Mahrattas ..	9	17	—	713	739	713	—	—	2
120th Infantry ..	10	13	—	693	716	693	—	—	2
32nd Company, S. & M. ..	—	—	—	—	—	93	—	—	—
83rd Battery, R.F.A.	4	—	140	24	168	—	—	6	—
						2,693	—	6	8
Column C.									
H.Q. 17th Infantry Brigade	3	—	10	7	20	—	—	—	—
1st Oxford & Bucks L.I.	19	—	619	—	638	619	—	—	2
22nd Punjabis.. ..	11	14	—	665	690	665	—	—	2
103rd Mahrattas (*b*) ..	11	19	—	652	682	652 (*b*)	—	—	2
119th Infantry ..	10	12	—	665	687	665	—	—	2
48th Pioneers	12	15	—	694	721	694	—	—	2
37th Company, S. & M. ..	4	3	2	185	194	187	—	—	—
63rd Battery, R.F.A... ..	3	—	142	29	174	—	—	6	—
93rd Heavy Battery, R.G.A.(*c*)	4	—	80	—	84	—	—	4 (*c*)	—
						3,482 (*e*)	—	10 (*d*)	10

APPENDIX XI.—*contd.*

Unit.	Officers. British.	Officers. Indian.	Other ranks. British.	Other ranks. Indian.	Grand Total.	Rifles.	Sabres.	Guns.	Machine Guns.
Flying Column.									
H.Q. 30th Infantry Brigade	3	—	2	2	7	—	—	—	—
76th Punjabis.. ..	12	23	—	715	750	715	—	—	2
H.Q. Cavalry Brigade ..	5	—	1	7	13	—	—	—	—
7th Lancers	11	16	—	396	423	—	396	—	2
16th Cavalry	10	15	—	273	298	—	273	—	2
33rd Cavalry	10	12	—	308	330	—	308	—	2
"S" Battery, R.H.A.	4	—	126	34	164	—	—	6	—
Maxim Battery ..	2	—	14	41	57	—	—	—	6
Armoured Car Section ..	(*f*)	(*f*)	(*f*)	(*f*)	(*f*)	—	—	—	2
Cavalry Brigade Signal Troop and Ammunition Column ..	2	—	11	27	40	—	—	—	—
						715	977	6	16
Other Units and Details.									
H.Q. Divl. Engr. Commander	4	—	3	—	7	—	—	—	—
34th Divl. Signal Company ..	5	1	61	133	200	—	—	—	—
B.G.R.A. and Staff	3	—	8	4	15	—	—	—	—
H.Q. 10th Brigade, R.F.A. ..	—	—	8	—	8	—	—	—	—
Divl. Ammunition Column ..	2	2	48	119	171	—	—	—	—
H.Q. Indian Mountain Artillery Brigade	1	—	—	7	8	—	—	—	—
H.Q. Heavy Brigade, R.G.A.	2	—	4	—	6	—	—	—	—
104th Heavy Battery, R.G.A.	2	—	43	—	45	—	—	—	—
Volunteer Artillery Battery ..	1	—	7	—	8	—	—	—	—
Wireless Section	1	—	14	7	22	—	—	—	—
Divisional Cavalry (Squadron 23rd Cavalry)	2	2	—	103	107	—	103	—	—
						—	103	—	—
Grand Total Effective Strengths	317	255	2,716	10,468	13,756				

(*a*) Half the 22nd Company, S. & M. were allotted to Column B.

(*b*) The 103rd Mahrattas were not engaged on the 22nd.

(*c*) Two guns were on the river in barges.

(*d*) Only eight guns with Column C.

(*e*) Includes 652 rifles of 103rd Mahrattas, of whom half were left at Lajj as camp guard, and the remaining half not actually engaged on the 22nd November, being employed on transport escort duties.

(*f*) Strength not known.

Grand total of effective rifles, sabres, guns and machine guns.

Rifles	10,540	
Sabres	1,080	
Guns	30	(excluding two guns of 86th Heavy Battery in barges.
Machine Guns	46	

Note.—The total of rifles includes half battalion 103rd Mahrattas which was left at Lajj on the 22nd November as camp guard.

APPENDIX XII.

Casualties of Major-General C. V. F. Townshend's force in action at Ctesiphon on 22nd, 23rd and 24th November 1915.

Units.	British.						Indian.									Total casualties.	Percentage of casualties to strength.
	Officers.			Other ranks.			Officers.			Other ranks.			Followers.				
	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.		
H.Q. 6th Division	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
H.Q. 16th Infantry Brigade	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
2nd Dorsetshire	1	10	—	18	207	7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	243	43·4
104th Rifles	1	7	1	—	—	—	—	7	—	15	325	67	—	—	—	423	61·5
24th Punjabis (½ battalion) ..	2	2	—	—	—	—	1	5	—	25	144	43	—	—	—	222	64·8
66th Punjabis	1	7	—	—	—	—	4	5	—	41	194	4	—	—	—	256	33·2
2/7th Gurkhas	3	3	—	—	—	—	2	6	—	33	139	9	—	—	—	195	28·2
117th Mahrattas	1	3	—	—	—	—	4	5	—	32	177	18	—	—	—	240	38·0
30th Brigade Signal Section	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—	—	—	—	3	—
22nd Company, S. & M.	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	10	17	—	—	—	—	29	—
82nd Battery, R.F.A.	—	—	—	—	8	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8	—
1/5th Hants Howitzer Battery ..	—	1	—	1	2	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	5	—

APPENDIX XII.—*contd.*

Units.	British.						Indian.									Total casualties.	Percentage of casualties to strength.
	Officers.			Other ranks.			Officers.			Other ranks.			Followers.				
	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.		
H.Q. 18th Infantry Brigade	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Nil.	—
2nd Norfolk	5	9	—	27	225	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	268	48·3
7th Rajputs	—	5	—	—	—	—	—	9	—	35	242	1	—	1	—	293	42·5
110th Mahrattas	2	6	—	—	—	—	5	8	—	39	370	7	—	3	—	440	59·5
120th Infantry	2	1	—	—	—	—	1	4	—	17	179	6	—	—	—	210	29·3
63rd Battery, R.F.A.	—	2	—	—	9	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	11	—
H.Q. 17th Infantry Brigade	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
1st Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry ..	7	6	—	72	190	29	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	304	47·6
22nd Punjabis	2	3	—	—	—	—	7	3	1	64	220	8	—	—	—	308	44·6
103rd Mahrattas	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Nil	—
119th Infantry	—	5	—	—	—	—	2	7	—	33	142	10	—	—	—	199	28·9
48th Pioneers	4	3	—	—	—	—	4	5	1	74	186	—	—	—	—	277	38·4
17th Company, S. & M.	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	12	—	—	—	—	14	—
76th Battery, R.F.A.	—	2	—	2	14	—	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	21	—
86th Heavy Battery, R.G.A.	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	2	—
H.Q. 30th Infantry Brigade	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	—
76th Punjabis	2	2	—	—	—	—	3	5	—	44	244	2	—	—	—	302	40·2

H.Q. Cavalry Brigade	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	Nil	—
7th Lancers	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	2	1	9	54	—	—	—	68	—
16th Cavalry	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	3	—	2	50	2	—	—	59	—
33rd Cavalry	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	23	1	—	—	26	—
"S" Battery, R.H.A.	1	—	—	2	27	1	—	—	—	1	2	1	—	—	35	—
Cavalry Brigade Signal Troop	—	—	—	—	3	—	—	—	—	—	3	2	—	—	8	—
Pack Wireless Section	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	2	—
B.G.R.A. and Staff	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
H.Q. 10th Brigade, R.F.A.	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Divisional Ammunition Column ..	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	1	—
H.Q. No. 1 Mountain Artillery Brigade	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—
Squadron, 23rd Cavalry..	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	3	3	—	—	6	—
34th Divisional Signal Company ..	—	1	—	—	10	—	—	—	—	1	10	1	—	—	23	—
Transport Establishment	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8	44	9	61	—
Medical Establishment	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	17	—	19	—
	39	91	1	122	700	39	34	74	3	479	2,744	185	8	65	9	4,593	—

SUMMARY.

	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Total.
British officers	39	91	1	131
British rank and file	122	700	39	861
Indian officers	34	74	3	111
Indian rank and file	479	2,744	185	3,408
Followers	8	65	9	82
Total	682	3,674	237	4,593

APPENDIX XIII.

Order of Battle of the force, under Major-General C. V. F. Townshend, besieged in Kut al Amara.

Headquarters 6th Division { G.S.O. (1) Lieut.-Col. U. W. Evans, R.E.
A.Q.M.G. Lieut.-Col. W. W. Chitty.

INFANTRY.

16th Infantry Brigade. (Major-General W. S. Delamain.)
- 2nd Dorsetshire Regiment (Major G. M. Herbert).
- 66th Punjabis (Lieut.-Col. A. Moore).
- 104th Rifles (Capt. C. M. S. Manners).
- 117th Mahrattas (Major Mc V. Crichton).

17th Infantry Brigade. (Brig.-General F. A. Hoghton.)
- 1st Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (Lieut.-Col. E. A. E. Lethbridge).
- 22nd Punjabis (Capt. A. O. Sutherland).
- 103rd Mahrattas (Lieut.-Col. W. H. Brown).
- 119th Infantry (Capt. F. I. O. Brickman).

18th Infantry Brigade. (Brig.-General W. G. Hamilton.)
- 2nd Norfolk Regiment (Major F. C. Lodge).
- 7th Rajputs (Lieut.-Col. H. O. Parr).
- 110th Mahrattas (Major H. C. Hill).
- 120th Infantry (Major P. F. Pocock).

30th Infantry Brigade. (Major-General Sir C. Melliss.)
- Half battalion 2nd Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment (Major J. W. Nelson).
- One company 1/4th Hampshire Regiment (Major F. L. Footner).
- 24th Punjabis (Lieut.-Col. H. A. V. Cummins).
- 76th Punjabis (Capt. E. Milford).
- 2/7th Gurkhas (Lieut.-Col. W. B. Powell).
- Half battalion, 67th Punjabis (Major C. E. S. Cox).

PIONEERS.

48th Pioneers (Col. A. J. N. Harward).

CAVALRY.

One squadron, 23rd Cavalry (Capt. C. H. K. Kirkwood).
One squadron, 7th Lancers (Lieut. F. T. Drake-Brockman).

ROYAL ENGINEERS.

(Lieut.-Col. F. A. Wilson.)

Bridging Train (Capt. E. W. C. Sandes).
17th Company, Sappers and Miners (Lieut. K. B. S. Crawford).
22nd Company, Sappers and Miners (Lieut. A. B. Matthews).
Sirmur Company, Imperial Service Sappers (Capt. C. E. Colbeck).
Engineer Field Park (Capt. H. W. Tomlinson).

ARTILLERY.

(Brig.-General G. B. Smith.)

10th Brigade, R.F.A. (Lieut.-Col. H. N. St. J. Maule.)
- 63rd Battery (Major H. Broke Smith)
- 76th Battery (Major O. S. Lloyd)
- 82nd Battery (Major E. Corbould Warren)

} 18 guns.

1/5th Hants Howitzer Battery (Major H. G. Thomson) .. .. .. 4 guns.
86th Heavy Battery, R.G.A. (5-inch guns) (Lieut. Col. M. H. Courtenay) .. .. 4 guns.
One section, 104th Heavy Battery, R.G.A. (4-inch guns) (Major W. C. R. Farmar) .. .. 2 guns.
Volunteer Artillery Battery (15-pounder) (Major A. J. Anderson) .. 4 guns.
One spare 18-pounder gun .. .. 1 gun.
6th Divisional Ammunition Column (Capt. E. T. Martin)
Two 13-pounder guns of "S" Battery, R.H.A. .. .. .. 2 guns.

MISCELLANEOUS.

Maxim Battery (six machine guns) (Capt. C. H. Stockley).
Detachment, Army Signal Company (Major F. Booth).
34th Divisional Signal Company (Capt. H. S. Cardew).
One brigade section, 12th Divisional Signal Company.
Wireless section (two wagon and one pack set).
A few details, Royal Flying Corps (Capt. S. C. Winfield-Smith).
Supply and Transport personnel, including details of the Jaipur Transport Corps and of the 13th, 21st, 26th and 30th Mule Corps (Lieut.-Col. A. S. R. Annesley).
No. 32 Field Post Office.

Three Chaplains.
- Rev. H. Spooner (Church of England).
- Rev. Father T. Mullen (Roman Catholic).
- Rev. A. Y. Wright (Wesleyan).

MEDICAL UNITS.

(Col. P. Hehir, I.M.S.)

No. 2 Field Ambulance.
No. 4 Field Ambulance.
No. 106 Field Ambulance.
No. 157 Indian Stationary Hospital.
No. 9 Indian General Hospital.
Half No. 3A British General Hospital.
Officers' Hospital.
One section, Veterinary Field Hospital (Capt. H. Stephenson).

NAVAL DETACHMENT.

H.M.S. *Sumana* (gunboat, one 12-pounder and two 3-pounder guns)* (Lieut. L. C. P. Tudway, R.N.).
Four steam launches.†
Two motor launches.
Six barges.
Four 4·7-inch guns in horse-boats (Lieut. M. A. B. Johnston, R.G.A.).
One 12-pounder gun‡ intended for H.M.S. *Firefly*.

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* Of these, the 12-pounder and one 3-pounder were mounted ashore in March 1916.

† Of these, three were sunk on the destruction of the bridge on 9th/10th December.

‡ This gun was mounted ashore on the town river front at the beginning of January 1916.

APPENDIX XIV.

Organisation and Distribution of British troops on the Tigris line on 3rd January 1916, excluding the garrison at Kut al Amara.

At Ali Gharbi.

Tigris Corps Headquarters.

7th Division (Major-General Sir G. Younghusband).

28th Infantry Brigade. (Major-General G. V. Kemball.)
- 2nd Leicestershire Regiment.
- 51st Sikhs.
- 53rd Sikhs.
- 56th Rifles.

35th Infantry Brigade. (Brig.-General G. B. Rice.)
- 1/5th Buffs (East Kent Regiment).
- 37th Dogras.
- 97th Infantry.
- 102nd Grenadiers.

19th Infantry Brigade. (Lieut.-Col. Dennys, 125th Rifles)
- 1st Seaforth Highlanders.
- 28th Punjabis.
- 92nd Punjabis.
- 125th Rifles.

Three brigade signal sections.
13th Company Sappers and Miners, and Bridging Train.
128th Pioneers.

9th Brigade R.F.A.
- 19th Battery, R.F.A.
- 20th Battery, R.F.A.
- 28th Battery, R.F.A.

Eighteen 18-pounder Q.F. guns.

1/1st Sussex Battery, R.F.A. (four 15-pounder guns).

Heavy Artillery Brigade
- 72nd Heavy Battery (four 5-inch howitzers).
- 77th Heavy Battery (four 5-inch howitzers).
- One section 104th Heavy Battery (two 4-inch guns).

No. 20 Combined Field Ambulance.
Half No. 3 Combined Field Ambulance.

6th Cavalry Brigade (Brig.-General H. Roberts).

"S" Battery, R.H.A. (four guns).

14 squadrons:
- 14th Hussars.
- 7th Lancers (less one squadron).
- 33rd Cavalry (less one squadron).
- 4th Cavalry.

Cavalry Brigade Ammunition Column.
Cavalry Brigade Signal Troop.

Other Units (directly under Corps Commander).

16th Cavalry (less one squadron).
107th Pioneers.
1/4th Hampshire Regiment (less one company).
One company, 67th Punjabis.
1st Provisional Battalion (i.e., drafts for units at Kut).
23rd Mountain Battery (less one section), four guns.
One 15-pounder post gun (of Volunteer Artillery Battery).
One brigade section of a signal company.
Four wireless stations (one wagon and three pack).
Medical Units—
- No. 18 Cavalry Field Ambulance, of one British and one Indian section.
- No. 131 Indian Cavalry Field Ambulance, of three Indian sections.
- No. 1 Field Ambulance, of two sections.
- Nos. 5 and 6 Field Ambulances, improvised, consisting of two sections each.

Transport.

1,353 pack mules.
865 carts with draught animals.

Royal Flying Corps.

Two aeroplanes.

En route to ALI GHARBI.

6th Jats (21st Infantry Brigade).
9th Bhopal Infantry (7th Infantry Brigade).
41st Dogras (19th Infantry Brigade).
7th Division Ammunition Column.
} Arrived Ali Gharbi on 4th January.

Divisional Staff, 7th Division.
Staffs of 9th and 21st Infantry Brigades.
2nd Black Watch (21st Infantry Brigade).
} Arrived Ali Gharbi on 5th January.

62nd Punjabis (36th Infantry Brigade), arrived 7th January.
2nd Rajputs (21st Infantry Brigade), arrived Shaikh Saad 11th January.
61st Howitzer Battery (7th Division) (six 4·5-inch howitzers), arrived Shaikh Saad 11th January.

FULAIFILA.

One company, 20th Punjabis.

AMARA.

Three 15-pounder guns, Volunteer Artillery Battery.
Half battalion, 3rd Brahmans.
Details: 1,000 infantry convalescents.
Headquarters, Wireless Squadron.
Medical Units—
No. 19 Combined Clearing Hospital, two sections.
Portion of No. 3A British General Hospital.
Portion of No. 9 Indian General Hospital.
One section No. 2 British General Hospital.
Bengal Stationary Hospital.

QALA SALIH.

20th Punjabis (less two companies).

Naval Flotilla.

H.M. Gunboats *Butterfly*, *Dragonfly*, *Cranefly* and *Gadfly*.
Also two launches for minesweeping.
The S.N.O. (Captain W. Nunn, R.N.) was on board the *Gadfly*.

APPENDIX XV.

Tigris Corps: Artillery Ammunition Expenditure at the Actions of Shaikh Saad, Wadi and Hanna, January 1916.

		Shaikh Saad and Wadi.	*Hanna.*
10-pounder	Shrapnel	400	955
	Common	—	—
	Star	—	—
13-pounder	Shrapnel	752	311
15-pounder	Shrapnel	955	815
18-pounder	Shrapnel	4,134	8,055
4-inch gun	Shrapnel	112	150
	Lyddite	—	84
4·5-inch howitzer	Shrapnel	—	—
	Lyddite	94	674
5-inch howitzer	Shrapnel	270	922
	Lyddite	288	347
	Totals	7,005	12,313

This ammunition was fired by the following number of guns:—

10-pounder mountain guns	4
13-pounder R.H.A. guns	4
15-pounder R.F.A. guns	4
18-pounder R.F.A. guns	18
4·5-inch howitzers	6
4-inch guns	2
5-inch howitzers	8
Total	46 guns

APPENDIX XVI.

Some Infantry Casualties on 21st January 1916.

Unit.	Approximate fighting strength at dawn 21/1/16.			Casualties.			Percentage of Casualties to Strength
	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks.	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks.	
							%
19th Brigade :—							
1/Seaforth Highlanders	7	—	519	1	—	63	
28th Punjabis ..	6	8	273	3	2	76	
92nd Punjabis ..	1	5	258	—	1	70	
125th Rifles	4	5	285	2	—	15	
9th Bhopal Infantry ..	7	8	299	—	3	61	
102nd Grenadiers ..	8	15	350	4	3	145	40
35th Brigade :—							
2/Black Watch ..	8	—	305	6	—	175	57
6th Jats	6	6	170	4	2	163*	92
41st Dogras	4	8	304	4	—	123	39
37th Dogras	9	10	350	6	7	178	54
1/5th Buffs	4	—	252	3	—	75	30
97th Infantry ..	5	6	202	4	1	129	62
9th Brigade :—							
1/Connaught Rangers	22	—	763	8	—	380	49
1/4th Hampshire ..	16	—	339	13	—	275	81
62nd Punjabis ..	11	21	787	5	10	295	37
107th Pioneers ..	9	13	556	1	—	18	
28th Brigade :—							
2/Leicestershire †.							
51st Sikhs	4			4	2	104	
53rd Sikhs				—	—	50	
56th Rifles							
128th Pioneers ..							
7th Brigade :—							
1/Manchester				—	—	2	
93rd Infantry				2	1	16	
1/1st Gurkhas ..				—	—	3	
1/9th Gurkhas ..				—	—	—	

* Includes 137 wounded. † Unit War Diary says about 12 casualties.

Note.—In the case of some units exact figures are not shown in the available records. In these cases the columns have been left blank.

APPENDIX XVII.

(1)

Telegram.—From the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to the Commander-in-Chief, India.

26th January 1916.
10.15 p.m.

Please telegraph for the information of the War Committee your views on the Mesopotamian military situation, and also the following details respecting Force " D " :—

1. Are all the units on Indian war establishment ?
2. The approximate present strength by arms of the force, British and native.
3. The approximate present strength of General Aylmer's force, giving details of the reinforcements *en route* (*a*) by road and (*b*) by river.
4. The state of *moral* and health of the troops.
5. The approximate dates on which further reinforcements from India will be sent.
6. The number, by classes, of machine guns.
7. An ammunition statement with respect to gun and small arms ammunition, bombs and grenades, flares and searchlights.
8. The position as regards supplies of Aylmer's column.
9. The attitude of the local Arabs.

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(2)

Telegram.—From the Commander-in-Chief, India, to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

27th January 1916.
10.40 p.m.

With reference to your telegram of 26th January, the following are my views on the military situation in Mesopotamia :—

The Turkish strength now at and below Baghdad is estimated to be five divisions, possibly totalling some 32,000 effectives with about 50 guns. Another Turkish division may be at Khaniqin. In view of your telegram of 21st January it seems possible that the Turks may by the beginning of March be able to increase their forces in the Baghdad region to a total of 11 divisions, or about 80,000 men, with, say, 132 guns, taking 12 guns per division. By 7th February the force under Aylmer, including the garrisons of posts on the river above Amara, should number 35 battalions, 19 squadrons and 74 guns, including 8½ battalions and 28 guns now *en route* up the Tigris. Three more field batteries from France are now arriving at Basra. If Townshend is relieved, by the middle of March, when we hope to have placed the three additional brigades from India in Mesopotamia, Lake should be able to concentrate a force of 45,000 rifles, 2,500 sabres and 120 guns in his fighting line on the Tigris. But in the event of Kut falling, then this force will be reduced to 36,000 rifles, 2,500 sabres and 86 guns. Of course, the check to Aylmer on the 21st January has prejudiced the prospects of relieving Townshend in time, that is, before 17th February, though I have just heard that Townshend now states that he can make his food supplies last for some time after that date.

The immediate objective of the Turks is doubtless to capture Townshend's force. Whether they capture Kut or not, they may subsequently decide (*a*) to continue operations against us, or (*b*) to secure Baghdad against us whilst operating against Russia with a view to penetrating into Persia.

In favour of (*a*). (1) With Kut in Turkish hands the Shatt al Hai is available from March to June as approach to Euphrates and Nasiriya, thus turning British position on Tigris above Qurna. (2) British force might have to concentrate to defend Basra to avoid risk of defeat in detail. (3) A British withdrawal down the Tigris below Amara opens oilfields in South-West Persia to invasion, and exposes Pusht-i-Kuh, Bakhtiari and other tribes to direct pressure. (4) If successful in driving British back below Amara, the Turks could operate in Persia practically free from anxiety as to safety of Baghdad.

Against the above are (*a*) the flood season favours the defence ; (*b*) summer climatic conditions favour operations into Persia and militate against those in lower Mesopotamia.

We must recognise, whatever course the Turks decide upon, we shall be unable to undertake advance on Baghdad in near future, especially as at present there is a shortage of river transport which it is most difficult to remedy, though we are taking every possible step to this end.

Should Kut fall, considerations affecting our future are (*a*) the nearer we are to Kut the greater the menace to any Turkish force using the Shatt al Hai and the greater the moral effect of our position on Pusht-i-Kuh, Persia and the Bakhtiari. (*b*) Below Ali Gharbi the above menace practically vanishes, as a sudden stroke against Kut is prohibited by the distance. (*c*) Ali Gharbi in our possession gives a flank position as regards the route through Pusht-i-Kuh to Amara and the oilfields.

The foregoing indicates, in my opinion, first, that Kut is the key to our position on the Tigris ; secondly, now is the time for a Russian offensive towards Khaniqin if it can be arranged ; thirdly, that if Kut be lost, then we should hold a point on the Tigris as high up the river as possible, and not lower than Ali Gharbi, as our pivot of manœuvre until we can see whether the situation justifies a fresh advance, permits us to hold our ground or imposes on us a further withdrawal. In the last case it might be necessary to fall back to the line Nasiriya–Qurna–Ahwaz.

Answers to your questions as regards details will be sent immediately.

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(3)

Telegram.—From the Commander-in-Chief, India, to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

27th January 1916.

11.45 p.m.

In continuation of my telegram of 27th January. In regard to questions of detail in your telegram of 26th January, the following are respective replies :—

1. Certain units, such as the 30th Squadron Flying Corps, have no Indian war establishment. Force is endeavouring to maintain all other units at or above Indian war establishments, except that camel transport has not been taken.

2. Approximate total strength of Force " D " at present, including Bushire, is as follows : British cavalry, 390 ; British infantry, 10,570 ; Indian cavalry, 4,000 ; Indian infantry, 38,300 ; artillery, 146 guns, with 4,220 British personnel and 2,115 Indian personnel. Engineers, 60 British personnel and

1,800 Indian personnel. Allowance is made in this estimate for 3,000 casualties on 20th–21st January. The Bushire garrison consists of one Indian squadron, two Indian battalions and seven guns.

3. Strength of General Aylmer's force and of reinforcements for it :—

	Estimated strength actually present.*	Reinforcements *en route*.	Drafts *en route* at sea.
	—	—	—
British infantry	4,720	1,078	1,640
Indian infantry	9,160	4,552	4,535
British cavalry	389	—	50
Indian cavalry	1,900	670	184

All the above reinforcements were proceeding by road, but Lake is now making arrangements to move some proportion, which we do not yet know, by river. The number of guns with General Aylmer's force is 46, and with reinforcements now proceeding to join him there are also 46, including three batteries now due at Basra.

4. As to the condition of the troops, health of troops is shown as satisfactory by medical report up to 8th January. It is not yet known how far the recent bad weather has affected this. As regards *moral*, Aylmer has expressed doubts with respect to some of the native regiments involved in the repulse on 21st January. Lake is joining Aylmer this evening and I await his report.

5. Approximate dates on which additional reinforcements other than drafts will be despatched from India will depend on the date of arrival in India of the Garrison and Territorial battalions from England and of the Indian infantry battalions from Egypt.

6. (*a*) So far as is known here, there should be with the force, including those with Townshend, at Nasiriya and in posts, the following numbers : ·303 Maxims, 158 ; ·303 Nordenfeldts, 17 ; Vickers, 38 ; total, 213.

(*b*) *En route* to Force " D " : Maxims—from China *en route* to Basra, 15 ; from Kirkee, 50 ; *en route* from South Africa, 20 ; total, 85. Vickers—*en route* from England, 10. Have not yet heard whether any were lost in the recent fighting.

7. Gun ammunition with force " D " is as follows :—

	Shrapnel.	Lyddite.	Star.
	—	—	—
5-inch gun	2,333	1,381	Nil
5-inch howitzer	4,696	6,596	Nil
4-inch gun	2,343	1,626	Nil
18-pounder	95,625	7,700	1,265
13-pounder	12,681	2,000	370
4·5-inch howitzer ..	7,000	9,070	Nil
15-pounder	17,000	Nil	Nil
10-pounder	10,659	1,977	706

N.B.—13-pounder and 18-pounder lyddite is high-explosive, and 10-pounder lyddite is common shell.

(*b*) S.A.A. 41,000,000 rounds approximately.

(*c*) Flares. Force " D " has none.

(*d*) Searchlights. Electric 90 c.c. projectors, coast defence, 2 ; 18-inch projectors, 3 mobile. Oxy-acetylene 29-inch projectors, 2 mobile ; 16-inch projectors, 3 mobile.

(*e*) Bombs. About six tons of bombs have been despatched from England to Force " D," and it is not known how many of these remain.

(*f*) Grenades. 25,000 hand-grenades have been sent to Force " D," but no report of expenditure has been received ; 25,000 more are now under issue. An additional 50,000 have been asked for from England.

* *Note by Historical Section.*—The " estimated strength actually present " was considerably in excess of the actual figures on 27th January 1916, for which see Appendix XIX.

8. I have telegraphed for the precise situation of Aylmer's column as regards supplies, and as soon as possible I will inform you. It varies from day to day. All I can say now is that owing to shipping difficulties on the river I do not think we can do more than keep abreast of requirements at present. As additional craft reach Basra matters will improve.

9. The attitude of the local Arab varies with local events. Speaking generally, I may say that the attitude of all downstream of our advanced positions is fairly satisfactory, while all those upstream of the Turkish positions are pro-Turk. As we advance or recede the tribes swing from side to side. All, however, whether upstream or downstream, are inclined to give information to the Turks and to withhold it from us.

APPENDIX XVIII.

(1)

The Situation in Mesopotamia.

Note prepared by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff by direction of the War Committee.

1. The following is the best estimate I can make of the present and prospective strength and distribution of the opposing forces in Mesopotamia :—

Turks.

The following divisions are almost certainly all in Mesopotamia :—

2nd, 26th, 45th, 51st, 52nd, and a combined division made up of the 35th and 38th = six divisions.

Strength, all ranks, auxiliary services, etc. = 50,000 men.

The following *may* be in Mesopotamia :—

Two divisions from the 41st, 43rd, 44th, and 23rd = 16,000 to 20,000 men.

One other division may be following on from the west and may arrive early in February, if it has not been diverted to the Caucasus = 12,000 men.

Thus 50,000 men are there almost certainly, and it is possible that an additional 16,000 may be probably there now, while 12,000 more may be there early in February. I therefore estimate the maximum force the enemy would have in and around Baghdad by the 7th February at 78,000 men. The *fighting strength* of this force may probably not exceed 50,000 men, and a considerable portion of these consist of partially trained troops.

This force might be increased early in March by three more divisions, or to a maximum of 114,000 men, and towards the end of the month by two more divisions, bringing the total up to 130,000 men (or 90,000 fighting men), if the Turkish divisions which have begun to move east are all sent to Mesopotamia and none are diverted towards Egypt or towards Erzerum to oppose the victorious Russians. We ought shortly to obtain information as to this. At present it is only possible to say that it is highly probable that some Turkish reinforcements are on the way to the Caucasus.

British Forces.

——	Rifles.	Sabres.	Guns.
Invested at Kut al Amara	8,500	—	34
Now with General Aylmer,* after deducting estimated casualties to date	13,800	2,000	46
Reinforcements and drafts now *en route* up the Tigris	6,500	850	28
Reinforcements to be landed at Basra by the second week in February	5,100	—	—
Now reported arriving at Basra	—	—	18
At posts and on lines of communication ..	7,750	850	20
Grand total	41,650	3,700	146

In addition to the above, three infantry brigades (9,000 rifles) will leave India for Mesopotamia as soon as the relief units† arrive in India from Egypt and Home. It is also hoped that further drafts, about 3,000 strong, will be sent from England very shortly.

* *Note by Historical Section.*—The number of rifles and sabres here given is considerably in excess of the actual figures, for which see Appendix XIX.

†These units are being sent to India in the course of the next few days, and India has been asked to expedite despatch from India of the three infantry brigades.

Russian Forces.

In the area Hamadan–Qum–Tehran there are, it is believed, 10,000 infantry, 9,000 cavalry, 30 guns.

The Hamadan column was recently engaged at Kangavar with a force of Turks who first captured, but were subsequently driven from, this place.

2. From the above estimate it will be seen that the British relieving force now numbers 13,800 rifles, 2,000 sabres, and 46 guns, and that about 6,500 rifles, 850 sabres, and 28 guns are *en route* up the Tigris to reinforce it. Sir Percy Lake hoped that these would arrive by the 7th February, but his telegram No. 129/320/0 of the 28th January throws some doubt on this; part of these reinforcements are marching, and the recent rains have made movement on foot difficult. General Townshend can hold out on half rations until some time after the 17th February (the exact date is uncertain), but is not well supplied with artillery ammunition. It is possible, if the weather conditions improve, or further river transport becomes available, that the remaining reinforcements of 5,100 men will have reached the front by the end of February, bringing the relieving troops up to 25,400 rifles, 2,850 sabres, and 92 guns.

The most satisfactory feature in the situation is the considerable reinforcement of artillery which is now on its way up the Tigris. The importance of this arm in an attack on entrenchments is well known, and while we hold Kut al Amara the enemy cannot use the river to supply his troops opposing the relieving force with ammunition and food. In the next fight both the number of guns and the amount of ammunition at our disposal should be greatly superior to any which the Turks can put in the field. The recent bad weather and the floods have made movement across country very difficult, and must therefore have affected the Turkish troops opposing General Aylmer more than they have our own men. Further, even if the weather improves, the numbers which the enemy can maintain below Kut al Amara must be limited by supply considerations as long as we can prevent him from using the river. On the other hand, it is reported by General Aylmer that the *moral* of some of the native regiments involved in the repulse of the 21st January has been shaken.

The position now held by the Turks is some 22 miles from Kut al Amara, and we may expect that they will have prepared at least one more position between it and that at Es Sinn. Whether they would make any prolonged stand at the latter place, which is about seven miles from Kut al Amara, so long as General Townshend has artillery ammunition and is capable of any effective action, is doubtful. It is not possible in the time available to do more than has been done already to strengthen the relieving force. While, therefore, there are grounds for hoping that General Aylmer will reach Kut al Amara before General Townshend is compelled by starvation to surrender, it is by no means certain that this will be the case, and we must be prepared for either eventuality.

3. If and when the relief has been effected, the alternatives before us will be to withdraw to the line Amara–Nasiriya, and there maintain an active defence, or to hold our position at Kut al Amara, or at some point near it, such as Ali Gharbi, and thence act offensively as and when opportunity offers.

At present it is still uncertain whether the enemy intends to make his main effort against Mesopotamia or against Egypt, but the indications are strongly in favour of the former.

The line Amara–Nasiriya can probably be maintained without difficulty with the six divisions which will be available, when the three additional brigades arrive, against the largest force that the Turks can, according to our present information, bring against us. We should also be able to maintain the position at Kut al Amara so long as the marshes in its neighbourhood are in flood. Whether we can hold Kut al Amara after the floods subside will depend upon the extent of the Turkish defeat in the fighting which leads up to the relief of General Townshend, the condition of the latter's troops, whether the three brigades promised by the Government of India have or have not reached Mesopotamia, and upon the effect of the recent Russian success in the Caucasus.

4. The disadvantages of withdrawal from Kut al Amara are :—

(1) The situation in Persia and Afghanistan is threatening, and may become increasingly so if we fall back again. This will increase the difficulty of defending India.

(2) The Amir has shown signs of adopting an unfriendly attitude. The whole policy of Afghanistan is believed to be under discussion, and some of the tribal leaders have been urging the Amir to proclaim a *Jahad*.

(3) A Turkish invasion of Persia in strength may result in the defeat of the weak Russian detachments in Northern Persia, and the inhabitants would then probably join the Turks. The Shah may then be induced to declare war on us. In that event the Bakhtiari tribe, who inhabit the Persian oilfield district, would probably join our enemies. We might then lose the oilfields.

(4) We might, therefore, find that the number of troops required to maintain our positions in India, Persia, and Mesopotamia was considerably in excess of that now set aside for the purpose.

On the other hand, our position locally will be stronger on the Amara–Nasiriya line, and the Turks, owing to difficulties in regard to transport and distribution of supplies and ammunition will find that it will by no means be easy to attack us there in force.

5. The disadvantages of maintaining the forward position at Kut al Amara are that the force that can be kept there will, owing to the necessity for detachments to guard the longer line of communication, and also, perhaps, to difficulties of supply, be smaller than the force which we can keep at Amara. The force at Kut al Amara will also be exposed to attack by larger numbers of Turks, because the nearer the latter are to Baghdad the greater the force they can supply.

6. Whether to remain at Kut al Amara or whether to withdraw lower down the river is a question which must be decided after the conclusion of the relief operations. I would observe, however, that, by holding Kut al Amara, if it proves possible to do so, we may be able to carry out the defensive policy in the East laid down by the War Committee with greater economy of force than by withdrawing to some position lower down the Tigris. Sir Percy Lake may require more troops than are at present either with him or about to join him in order to hold Kut al Amara, but, even if that is so, it might be cheaper to send them than to run the risk of disturbance in Persia and Afghanistan. As pointed out in paragraph 1, no further large Turkish reinforcements are likely to reach Baghdad until the beginning of March, and it is improbable that these would be available at Kut al Amara before the end of that month. If the Turks move their reserves towards Mesopotamia their power to attack Egypt will be lessened, and we shall require fewer troops for the defence of that country. In accordance with the War Committee's decision of the 26th January, a division is being prepared in Egypt for despatch, if required, to Mesopotamia, and it will probably be a fortnight before it is ready to embark. No time will be lost, therefore, by deferring the decision as to the departure of this division for about ten days, and by that time it is possible that we may have some more definite news of the enemy's movements and intentions. A division starting from Egypt about the middle of February may be expected to reach Kut al Amara by the end of March.

7. I attach a telegram* which I have received from the Commander-in-Chief in India giving his views of the situation, and from this it will be seen that he is in general agreement with me as to the importance of holding Kut, if it is possible to do so.

My estimate of the numbers which the Turks could put into the field in Mesopotamia differs from that of the Commander-in-Chief in India. The figures from India have been consistently lower than ours, and there is no means of judging which are correct. The difference in fighting strength is not very great.

* See Appendix XVII.

In my opinion, he has under-estimated the difficulties which would be experienced by the Turks in maintaining a sufficiently large force on the Lower Tigris or Euphrates to prejudice our position there. Moreover, it is hardly conceivable that news of Turkish concentrations on one or other line should fail to reach us in sufficient time to enable adequate counter-measures to be taken.

Lastly, I do not agree that the moment is opportune to ask the Russians to undertake an offensive towards Khaniqin. The Russian forces in Persia are not large, and we are not in a position to help them if they get into trouble. If the Russians were to suffer a reverse as the result of our invitation the relations between the Allied forces in the East might be prejudiced. The most valuable assistance which the Russians can give us at the moment is to follow up their success in the neighbourhood of Erzerum.

W. R. ROBERTSON,
31st January 1916. *Chief of the Imperial General Staff.*

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(2)

The Control of the Operations in Mesopotamia.

Note prepared by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff by direction of the War Committee.

1. It has been a long-established custom for the Government of India to control and direct military operations which have been based upon that country. In the conduct of such operations it has, with rare exceptions, acted independently of the War Office, and His Majesty's Government has exercised such general control and supervision as have been required through the medium of the India Office. In effect, then, India has, from a military point of view, been treated as a country under British suzerainty.

2. This arrangement has had undoubted advantages in the past, when an intimate knowledge of local politics and local conditions has been of paramount importance ; when India has herself been able to meet the requirements of the situation, and when there has been no question of the employment of the resources of the Empire as a whole in the attainment of a common end. In the present war, however, established custom and local conditions must, to some extent, give way to the general aim. India can no longer meet the requirements of the campaign in Mesopotamia without assistance from Home, and the co-ordination of military operations in every theatre of war in which we are concerned has become a matter of urgency.

3. The system by which the campaign in Mesopotamia is controlled at the present time is undoubtedly cumbersome. The decisions of the War Committee are communicated through the Secretary of State for India to the Viceroy, who passes them on to the Commander-in-Chief in India, who in his turn issues his instructions to the General Officer Commanding in Mesopotamia. The War Office is not in as close a touch with the operations as is desirable, and has not at any given moment exact information as to the strength and distribution of the troops employed, yet it is called upon to provide reinforcements of men and munitions whenever the resources of India prove insufficient. These reinforcements can only come either from the reserves at Home or from other theatres of war, and events in Mesopotamia, over which the War Office has, up to the present time, had no control, thus react upon operations elsewhere which are under its direct supervision.

4. As an alternative to the existing system I recommend the following procedure :—

(1) The Commander-in-Chief in India to receive instructions with regard to military operations in Mesopotamia and Persia from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, under the authority of the Secretary of State for War, in exactly the same manner as the Commanders-in-Chief in other theatres. These instructions will, of course, be based on the decisions of the War Committee.

(2) India will remain, as at present, the main base of the force in Mesopotamia, which will continue to be administered by the Commander-in-Chief in India, such requirements of the force as India cannot meet being supplied from other parts of the Empire, subject to the general policy, at the time being, decided upon by the War Committee.

(3) The General Officer Commanding in Mesopotamia will send all reports of operations, states, returns, recommendations as to the higher appointments, and requests for additional units to the Commander-in-Chief in India, and will repeat these to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

(4) Demands for drafts to maintain Indian units now in Mesopotamia and for such war material as is being provided from India will, as at present, be made on the Commander-in-Chief, India.

(5) The Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Commander-in-Chief, India, will, as required, correspond direct in regard to the requirements of the force in Mesopotamia, but all questions of principle likely to affect the security of India will continue to be referred by the Commander-in-Chief in India to the Viceroy and, if necessary, will be communicated by him to the Secretary of State for India.

(6) Arrangements in regard to prisoners of war, our sick and wounded, and as to the finance of the campaign will remain as at present.

(7) All press *communiqués* will be issued through the War Office and telegraphed to the Commander-in-Chief, India.

(8) Intelligence obtained in India which might affect the operations will be communicated by wire to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and repeated to the General Officer Commanding in Mesopotamia.

5. The above arrangement will, in my opinion, enable the War Committee to adjust more effectively the respective requirements of the campaign in Mesopotamia and of the campaigns in other theatres. We have already reached a stage in the war when our forces in Egypt have become a general strategic reserve for the Empire, and it is almost certain that any considerable reinforcements either for India or for Mesopotamia must come from Egypt. It is in accordance with sound military principles that the authority which controls the reserves should also control the operations which those reserves may be required to support. It is also in accordance with these principles that the base of operations should be under the same general control as the forces in the field. It does not, therefore, seem advisable that the War Office should attempt to conduct directly the operations in Mesopotamia so long as India remains the main base for the campaign in that country, and consequently I have recommended that these operations should be controlled by the War Office, through the Commander-in-Chief in India.

6. The system proposed can only work effectively if it is accepted wholeheartedly by the Government of India, and if precedent and established custom are, for the nonce, set aside in the general interest. No compromise or half measure will lead to any improvement on the existing arrangement; while, given good-will on both sides, central control over all the forces of the Empire in the field will lead both to greater efficiency and economy of force. As to this we may well learn from our chief enemy, who now directs with great advantage to himself not only the military forces of the various principalities which compose his Empire, but even the armies of his allies. The cause of the *Entente* has suffered greatly from the want of co-ordinated action, and this lack of co-ordination is increased by the existing system under which India is outside the control of the Imperial General Staff.

W. R. ROBERTSON,
Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

War Office,
31st January 1916.

APPENDIX XIX.

Tigris Corps.—Effective Strengths, 27th January 1916.

Detail.	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks.		Remarks.
7th Brigade :—					
1/1st Gurkhas	11	11	665		
1/9th Gurkhas	11	11	606	1,927	
93rd Infantry..	10	16	656		
21st Brigade :—					
2/Black Watch	4	—	185		
6th Jats	3	5	66	832	3,541 Rifles on Right Bank.
2nd Rajputs (less wing) ..	10	9	409		
41st Dogras	3	6	172		
35th Brigade :—					
1/5th Buffs	4	—	203		
37th Dogras	3	4	239	782	
97th Infantry..	6	3	179		
102nd Grenadiers	4	11	161		
8th Brigade :—					
1/Highland Light Infantry ..	13	—	459		
1/Manchester	29	—	807	1,503	
9th Bhopal Infantry ..	7	3	237		
9th Brigade :—					
1/Connaught Rangers ..	?	—	380		
1/4th Hampshire	4	—	75	905	
62nd Punjabis	8	12	450		
19th Brigade :—					
1/Seaforth Highlanders ..	8	—	394		
28th Punjabis..	3	4	210	1,054	6,720 Rifles on Left Bank.
92nd Punjabis	8	12	450		
28th Brigade :—					
2/Leicestershire	6	—	467		
51st Sikhs	2	8	405	1,547	
53rd Sikhs	4	5	261		
56th Rifles	8	9	414		
128th Pioneers	11	13	578	1,159	
107th Pioneers	11	13	581		
13th Company, Sappers and Miners	4	4	154	552	
Provisional Battalion ..	3	7	398		
Cavalry :—					
14th Hussars	22	—	308		
4th Cavalry	13	14	380		
7th Lancers	7	8	264	1,342	
16th Cavalry	4	10	104		
33rd Cavalry	11	10	286		

APPENDIX XX.

(1)

Telegram.—From General Aylmer to General Townshend.

6th February 1916.

VERY SECRET.

My present intention is as follows:—

When sufficient reinforcements have arrived—namely, about middle of month—my present intention is to advance up right bank by night march with maximum force after leaving enough men to contain Turks in Hanna position. Probable number for advance, 12,000 bayonets, besides strong artillery and the Cavalry Brigade. I shall endeavour to defeat Turks at Es Sinn position or wherever found. Available land transport only allows of our carrying one day's food besides what is carried on the soldier. Whatever happens, your co-operation is essential to the fullest extent possible, but the ways in which it will be best ensured must depend on developments during next ten days, but alternate methods should at once receive your most careful consideration.

Case (A).—Should our success be sufficiently pronounced, I intend to follow the enemy across Hai and try to defeat him again wherever he stands, making for his ships and bridge. You state in your telegram of 5th that enemy is now hemming you in on right bank east of Kut with redoubts. This will render it impossible in your opinion for you to cross Tigris till our success has removed such blockade. There is no reason when this is effected why you should not cross your maximum available force to assist us in further operations if such course is then desirable. Such men might include such guns and Maxims as you can get across quickly.

Case (B).—If we succeed in driving Turks across Hai, it is quite possible that even with your assistance we might not be able to get any further than the Hai, but could hold enemy back while you deliberately crossed the Kut garrison to the right bank, including sick and wounded, who would be transported back to our present position. Army Commander has sanctioned my requiring you to do this if in my opinion the circumstances necessitate it.

In Case (A), viz., a temporarily weakened garrison, you may have to construct inner retrenchments in case your first line being forced by greatly superior forces. In Case (B) several such retrenchments will be absolutely essential, even with our assistance by enfilading fire, to enable you to extricate the garrison, as the enemy would be certain to press attack on north directly your withdrawal was pronounced. There are many other arrangements which will be necessary which will occur to you. You should at once put all such in hand. Those for (B) will probably be more than enough for (A).

In case of (A) during our attack and before you are able to cross or act otherwise, you can assist us with artillery fire on the flank of the enemy if he moves within your zone of effective fire, either in retreat or in attempting to send forward reinforcements.

You should make preparations for this. It will also be essential for us to obtain supplies from Kut in either Case (A) or Case (B). You must be prepared to cross these to right bank directly you can get across, and must let me know very early what you can give us. Please consider possibility of crossing such supplies beforehand to Liquorice Factory,* which would be suitable for Case (A) and possibly Case (B) if we could include factory within the line we can hold.

As regards bridges.—It is absolutely impossible for us to bring up by land with us in first instance the material you require for a boat bridge over the Tigris, so it is then out of the question.

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* i.e., Woolpress Village.

We have wire cables and two runners suitable for flying bridges over Tigris or lesser width. Have you also got any ? Can you construct two or possibly more rafts with superstructure for flying bridges and prepare material for landing stages ? You could possibly erect two on left bank and one on right bank at Liquorice Factory in anticipation. Each raft might be made out of two small *mahailas*.

To meet Case (A) we shall endeavour to take with us a very light trestle bridge for the Hai, suitable for infantry in single file, and as many Wheatly bags, waterproof sheets and tarpaulins as possible for crossing in rafts. Except for these we shall be dependent on fords or being able to seize enemy's bridge near Muhairja. As these means are somewhat sketchy and uncertain, could you possibly get together enough material in addition to rafts and landing stages to construct after we join hands a bridge over the Hai near Kut ? Material of otherwise unserviceable *mahailas* might possibly be used for this.

In addition to bridge over the Hai near Kut in Case (A), the two or more (if you have the material) flying bridges would assist transfer of men and supplies from one bank to another, and your advice is required as to where they should be established.

If you cannot possibly make bridge over Hai, one of the flying bridges might be made to cross it.

In Case (B) the flying bridges will be essential for transfer of garrison and guns. In Case (A), if Turkish force now there will not move from Hanna position, it is possible that enemy may transfer so many of his troops from Shumran to right bank against us that action on your part with maximum available troops may be advisable on left bank so as to fall on his camps and ships at Shumran instead of your joining us in our advance beyond Hai on right bank.

It is also possible that in other eventualities action on your part on the left bank may be necessary with or without our direct co-operation. You should prepare a scheme for this also.

Addressed 6th Division, repeated General Headquarters.

CORPS COMMANDER.

3.15 p.m.

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(2)

Telegram.—From General Townshend to Generals Aylmer and Lake.

7th February 1916.

1. I shall, of course, endeavour to co-operate with maximum strength on whichever bank my action is (required ?). On principle my maximum would be three weak brigades and one weak brigade left as minimum to hold Kut defences. Bulk of artillery on principle with minimum force. Artillery in present positions in our defences can co-operate with your advance on right bank and its fire sweep to assist your approach towards Hai south of Kut town will be improved.

2. I have already another line of defence behind the one I occupy now, and defences of outer walls and garden walls of town will be improved. Floods compelled me to abandon my first line of defence on the north-west section of defence.

3. You will observe by my former telegrams that I do not consider it possible to cross Tigris to right bank—that is, that portion of it below the Hai, enemy having placed more troops there and digging hard. The operation could not be carried out at night without detection, and probably would be a disaster. When you arrive opposite Kut I could then start crossing.

4. I should assist your passage of the Hai by action from Liquorice Village,* which is on west bank of Hai. To do so I should reinforce present garrison of village at night by ferry up to two brigades, and should, of course, co-operate with your advance along right bank against Turkish camp.

5. I note your instructions re sick and wounded and supplies to be placed on right bank when you arrive. I think supplies should be placed on east bank of Hai, as Liquorice Village is on west bank of Hai—that is, side nearest enemy and well within range of his guns. *Vide* my telegram of 22nd December re time taken to cross troops, sick, wounded, supplies, etc., but rafts will, of course, accelerate matters.

6. Bridges. I am going into the matter of rafts and landing stages.

7. Already considered project of attacking Turkish camp on left bank should that be necessary and have had ramps made for crossing trenches.

8. It all depends whether your success is a pronounced one or not. If you soundly beat or destroy the force against you on right bank there will be a general Turkish retreat. You can turn him on right bank, and to deal with a turning movement he must leave his entrenchments and then Turk is no use. But 12,000 rifles seems a small maximum force out of 20,000. Surely one brigade is ample entrenched on left bank to hold Turkish Hanna force in respect. I only used two battalions to do this last September. Turk will not leave his trenches and attack.

If you have any doubt as to result, would it not be wiser to wait and unite all forces before advancing, particularly 13th British Division. If this effort failed it would be a grave affair. I remember your remark re state of Indian troops with you after two indecisive actions and a reverse. Moreover, if you relieve us with large forces there will be no need to think of leaving Kut. I do not think Turks can possibly take Kut as long as you are face to face with them down river, and if Russians are menacing Baghdad and are successful Erzerum way, I do not see how any more reinforcements can be sent down the Tigris from Baghdad.

However, you are the best judge, so please do not mind my offering suggestions without being asked. Position here is a serious one, and I am anxious you should not fail again. You can imagine how anxious I am to see ourselves relieved. I have had a continual strain on me since I left Amara in September last. The whole of the operations has been on my shoulders—that is, the plans of operations, etc., and you know how ill I was when I left Simla to conduct the advance on Kut. I am quite well and cheerful, and no matter how desirous we are of being relieved, it is better that you should make certain of doing so.

As long as you keep your force in close contact below me, my force at Kut fulfils proper conditions of a detachment—that is, we are indirectly contributing to successful issue of the operations by holding superior forces in check at a point remote from battlefield.

We have material for one heavy and one very light flying bridge for spans of under 320 yards. Please bring your wire cables and as much 2-inch lashing rope as you can, and also your two travellers or runners.

We can construct one heavy flying bridge and its two landing stages across Tigris. We can construct two more double *mahaila* rafts and their landing stages, and possibly deck them with doors taken from town. Flying bridge at Liquorice Factory is impossible as the width is over 550 yards. Landing stages cannot be erected under present conditions as they would be under gun and rifle fire.

We can provide *mahailas* and road bearers for Hai, but no chesses will be available if the two rafts mentioned above are built, but the two rafts could be used as part of the bridge.

Material of unserviceable *mahailas* scarce and useless for planking.

Best site is half way between Kut and Fort for flying bridge.

Addressed Corps, repeated General Headquarters.

6th DIVISION.

* i.e., Woolpress Village.

APPENDIX XXI.

Telegram.—From General Aylmer to Generals Lake and Townshend.

17th February 1916.

VERY SECRET.

It is impossible for me from existing data to estimate exact strength or distribution of enemy's forces. Any day may bring important information tending to alter existing views. I am now inclined to view that the Turks have still very considerable strength at Hanna. There are, however, some indications that troops are being transported from left bank to right bank Tigris at Maqasis by barge and rafts there. There would apparently be no reason for such transfer unless such troops were being sent back from Hanna. Other available troops would certainly move to Es Sinn right bank position by Turkish bridges over Tigris and Hai. It seems to me that the great advantage which the Turks think that they have is in being able to keep our shipping at 25 miles from Kut, forcing us to adopt the plan of long march across country by right bank, using land transport. They would be foolish to endanger such an advantage by unduly weakening the Hanna position. Therefore, I do not think that they are likely to reduce Hanna garrison below 7,000 or 8,000 men. On the other hand, any marked success of ours at Es Sinn right bank would have such a moral effect as might induce them to withdraw definitely altogether. It is also in many ways to our advantage to keep the enemy strong at Hanna, which we can do by demonstrating against him there so that the numbers he can keep in reserve at Shumran, and consequently send to Es Sinn right bank position as reinforcements when we attack it, may be minimised.

The distribution of tents as seen by aeroplane reconnaissance would appear to indicate one strong division besides cavalry and guns at Es Sinn right bank and on Hai near Turkish bridge. I am pretty sure that the Turks anticipate an advance by us on right bank and see that we must turn their right flank, as they are strongly entrenching a line from the Sinn Abtar redoubt, which is three miles from the Tigris, almost due south for two miles back to a strong redoubt which they are constructing on a mound. They have also constructed a bridgehead on north of Hai, where their bridge is.

It seems to me most probable the combined difficulties of moving reinforcements from Baghdad and of keeping their forces to the east of Kut supplied will prevent them from placing more than a strong division with cavalry and guns in the Es Sinn right bank position except at a critical moment for a short time. Hence any troops they have over, after providing for the garrison of Hanna and a strong division at Es Sinn right bank position, must remain at Shumran or encircling Kut to north or the Liquorice Factory* to the south-west of that place. Agents' reports indicate a new division having arrived at Baghdad about 7th instant and being delayed there. Even if this is exaggerated, it would appear that the Turks may obtain further reinforcements any day at or about Shumran, but it seems to be somewhat improbable that they will be posted further to the east at once on account of supply and transport difficulties. They will also be influenced in keeping back a strong reserve by the doubt as to which bank it will have to be sent. Hence in the immediate future we may, I think, anticipate a distribution of troops somewhat as follows :—

Hanna, 7,000 to 10,000 infantry; Sinn, 8,000 infantry; Shumran and Kut, remainder. The maintenance of the Kut blockade will probably absorb about 5,000 of the remainder, so that their reserve for active operations would not exceed their total force *minus* 20,000 or 23,000. Their total strength

* i.e., Woolpress Village.

in infantry at present, not counting anything that may have arrived after the 2nd Division, is probably not above 25,000. I think less. A new division would bring them up to, say, 32,000; so that their mobile reserve might be well over 10,000 men with a new division, or only 3,000 without it. These new divisions take a very long time to concentrate at Kut, and it is not at all certain from the numbers of regiments given by agent as at Baghdad that one at least does not belong to 2nd Division. At the present moment I do not think such a reserve would exceed 3,000 or 4,000 men, but this number will gradually increase possibly to 10,000.

The strength of force we can use for the right bank scheme is limited by the question of transport. We could just equip five brigades with transport enough for carrying one day's food besides two days' on the soldier. Two more brigades could be used practically without transport to demonstrate against the front of the Sinn position and minimise danger from counter-stroke and reverse. There is no great advantage, therefore, in awaiting very large reinforcements, except that they make our containing force left here stronger.

There are obvious disadvantages, namely, increase of enemy's mobile reserve, strength of entrenchments at Es Sinn, and approach of the time when country may be flooded. Possibility of push depends on weather and state of ground. It wants several days' sun after heavy rain to allow of large transport columns moving across this particular country, especially at night. It rained last night and weather is now very threatening indeed.

Your telegram under reference indicates the 13th Artillery Brigade will be delayed a week longer than I anticipated. As explained in my telegram of 10th, I still propose to start push at most opportune moment as long as I consider it has a good chance of success. If I had prospect of getting two more brigades within reasonable time I might settle to await their arrival, which is now entirely problematical. Should such a push from this place turn out impracticable, the alternative I have left is to renew the attempt on the Hanna position. To meet this I am doing all I can to push forward our trenches towards those of the enemy. We are now firmly established within 750 yards. From Willcocks' map there appears to be a serious depression this side of Sannaiyat position which the Turks could flood directly the Tigris rises high enough. There are doubtless other areas on both banks which the Turks can flood at high Tigris. I consider that this power of flooding will greatly favour Turks as long as they follow the waiting game. It thus seems to me most necessary that the alternative scheme of advancing by left bank must be carried out before high Tigris.

Your telegram seems clearly to show that the bulk of the two divisions from India and Egypt cannot arrive before high Tigris, but that individual units may do so. I think that as a whole the two divisions may be regarded as not available for the relief of Kut, and this seems to be your opinion, as you state that their present proposed locations are Basra and Amara. Individual units of the two divisions arriving early would be invaluable to me whatever happens, and should be shoved up as soon as they arrive, consistent with possibility of supplying the whole force, and I see no reason why this should not be done. British units should have precedence over Indian ones. The nearer we can approach Sinn position on left bank, the easier it becomes to use large forces on either bank against it, and the harder for the enemy to know where to send his reserve from Shumran, which is still a long way to rear.

To sum up: my intentions are (1) to carry out right bank push as soon as conditions allow, either with the five brigades available or with seven brigades as previously indicated. (2) Meantime, so as to provide for above proving impossible, to continue to take action which will render possible the second alternative with least delay so as to anticipate floods.

To answer points raised in your telegram categorically:—

Para. 1. I cannot now say when right bank push can take place, but would like 13th Brigade, R.F.A., and two brigades infantry as early as possible, so that it may strengthen push if necessarily delayed. Under existing conditions

I still prefer the right bank push to any other scheme, but it may become impossible or be desirable to delay it for two more brigades.

Para. 2. The question is not really one of the maximum number of troops which can arrive, but of maximum number of troops which can arrive in time on account of floods and which can be supplied. I have at present no idea when the further divisions as a whole could reach me, and they may come too late. To settle now definitely to await their arrival would be, in my opinion, fatal on account of high Tigris and supply difficulties. We must take the risks, and I am quite ready to accept the responsibility of doing so. The boldest course is often the best.

Para. 3. I shall answer in another telegram.

Para. 4. I most strongly urge that, to avoid possibility of failure, as much of the divisions as arrive in time to assist in the relief of Kut should be pushed up here provided you can feed them. We require maximum strength at the vital spot which may just turn the scale. For example, an assault on the Hanna position would probably lead to necessity of employing fresh troops before we could take Sannaiyat or Es Sinn. Even if we cannot use greater numbers in the actual right bank push, we could use them to assault Hanna position at the same time or to minimise result of a reverse.

APPENDIX XXII.

Order of Battle and Distribution of the British Forces in Mesopotamia on the 27th February 1916 (excluding the garrison of Kut al Amara).

Under Lieut.-General Sir F. J. Aylmer, V.C., K.C.B., in the vicinity of Wadi.

Headquarters Tigris Corps.

3rd Division (Major-General H. d'U. Keary).

7th Infantry Brigade. (Major-General R. G. Egerton).
- 1/Connaught Rangers (including drafts for 2/Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment).
- 27th Punjabis.
- 89th Punjabis.
- 128th Pioneers.

8th Infantry Brigade. (Lieut.-Colonel F. P. S. Dunsford, 2nd Rajputs.)
- 1/Manchester Regiment.
- 2nd Rajputs.
- 47th Sikhs.
- 59th Rifles.

9th Infantry Brigade. (Brig.-General L. W. Y. Campbell, 89th Punjabis.)
- 1/Highland Light Infantry.
- 1/1st Gurkhas.
- 1/9th Gurkhas.
- 93rd Infantry.

4th Brigade, R.F.A. (7th, 14th and 66th Batteries) = 18 guns.
20th Field Company, Sappers and Miners.
21st Field Company, Sappers and Miners.
34th Sikh Pioneers.
One squadron, 16th Cavalry.
No. 3 Divisional Signal Company.
Mobile Veterinary Section.

7th Division (Major-General Sir G. J. Younghusband).

19th Infantry Brigade. (Brig.-General E. C. Peebles.)
- Composite Highland Battalion (2/Black Watch and 1/Seaforth Highlanders).
- 28th Punjabis.
- 92nd Punjabis.
- 125th Rifles.

21st Infantry Brigade. (Brig.-General C. E. Norie.)
- Composite English Battalion (2/Norfolk and 2/Dorsetshire).
- 6th Jats.
- 9th Bhopal Infantry.
- Composite Mahratta Battalion (drafts for Mahratta battalions in Kut).

28th Infantry Brigade. (Major-General G. V. Kemball.)
- 2/Leicestershire Regiment.
- Provisional Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry.
- 51st Sikhs.
- 53rd Sikhs.
- 56th Rifles.

9th Brigade, R.F.A. (19th, 20th and 28th Batteries) = 18 guns.
3rd Field Company, Sappers and Miners.
107th Pioneers.
One squadron, 16th Cavalry.
No. 7 Divisional Signal Company.
Mobile Veterinary Section.

Cavalry Brigade (Brig.-General R. C. Stephen),
"S" Battery, R.H.A. (less one section) = 4 guns.
14th Hussars.
4th Cavalry.
7th Lancers (only three squadrons strong).
33rd Cavalry (less one squadron).

Corps Troops.

35th Infantry Brigade. (Brig.-General G. B. H. Rice.)
- Composite Territorial Battalion (1/5th Buffs and 1/4th Hampshire).
- Composite Dogra Battalion (37th and 41st Dogras).
- 97th Infantry.

36th Infantry Brigade. (Brig.-General G. Christian.)
- 1/6th Devonshire Regiment.
- 26th Punjabis.
- 62nd Punjabis.
- 82nd Punjabis.

12th Company, Sappers and Miners (less one section).
13th Company, Sappers and Miners.
Field Troop, Sappers and Miners (*en route*).
13th Brigade, R.F.A. (2nd, 8th and 44th Batteries)—*en route* = 18 guns.
60th Howitzer Battery, R.F.A.
61st Howitzer Battery, R.F.A. = 12 4·5-inch howitzers.
23rd Mountain Battery (less one section) = 4 10-pounder guns.
Home Counties Brigade, R.F.A. (less one battery).
- 1/1st Sussex Battery
- 1/3rd Sussex Battery

= 8 15-pounder guns.

72nd Heavy Battery, R.G.A.
77th Heavy Battery, R.G.A. = 8 5-inch howitzers.
One section, 104th Heavy Battery, R.G.A. = 2 4-inch guns.
7th Divisional Ammunition Column.
Signal Units :—
- Wireless—one wagon and two pack stations.
- No. 1 Army Corps Signal Company.
- No. 12 Divisional Signal Company (less two brigade sections).
- No. 33 Divisional Signal Company (two brigade sections).

Medical Units :—
- No. 18 Cavalry Field Ambulance (two sections).
- No. 131 Indian Cavalry Field Ambulance.
- No. 3 Combined Field Ambulance (two sections).
- No. 1 Field Ambulance (less headquarters).
- No. 20 Combined Field Ambulance.
- No. 7 British Field Ambulance, No. 8 British Field Ambulance *en route*.
- No. 19 British Field Ambulance.
- No. 20 British Field Ambulance.
- No. 21 Combined Field Ambulance—*en route*.
- No. 111 Indian Field Ambulance.
- No. 112 Indian Field Ambulance.
- No. 113 Indian Field Ambulance—*en route*.
- No. 128 Indian Field Ambulance.
- No. 129 Indian Field Ambulance.
- No. 130 Indian Field Ambulance.
- No. 19 Combined Clearing Hospital.
- No. 4 Sanitary Section.

Various administrative units.
Air Service :—
- One flight, R.N.A.S. (only one plane serviceable).
- "B" Flight, No. 30 Squadron, R.F.C. (three serviceable planes).

En route *to join Tigris Corps.*

37th Infantry Brigade. (Brig.-General F. J. Fowler.)
- Brigade Headquarters.
- 1/4th Somerset Light Infantry.
- 1/2nd Gurkhas.

On the Tigris Line of Communications.

At Shaikh Saad ..
- 3rd Brahmans (less half battalion).
- 102nd Grenadiers (from 35th Brigade).
- One 15-pounder post gun.
- No. 83 Indian Stationary Hospital.

At Ali Gharbi ..
- Half, 67th Punjabis.
- One troop, 16th Cavalry.
- One 15-pounder post gun.
- One pack wireless station.

At Fulaifila .. ..
- One company, 20th Punjabis.

At Amara .. ..
- Half battalion, 3rd Brahmans.
- One company, 4th Rajputs (under orders for Basra).
- 20th Punjabis (less three companies).
- One troop, 16th Cavalry.
- Detachment, Volunteer Artillery Battery (with one 15-pounder and one 5-inch gun).
- Depot, No. 30 Squadron, R.F.C.
- One brigade section, No. 12 Divisional Signal Company.
- Headquarters of Wireless Signal Squadron (with one wagon station and two spare pack sets).
- Medical Units :—
  - Two sections, No. 3A British General Hospital.
  - Two sections, No. 2B British General Hospital.
  - Two sections, No. 9 Indian General Hospital.
  - One section, No. 2D British General Hospital.
  - Bengal Stationary Hospital.
  - No. 6 Advanced Depot Medical Stores.
  - No. 3 Sanitary Section.
- No. 9 Field Veterinary Section.
- Advanced Remount Section.

At Qala Salih and on bridge guards.
- One company, 20th Punjabis.

At Qurna .. ..
- 112th Infantry.
- 43rd Erinpura Regiment (less half battalion) (under orders for Nasiriya).
- No. 4 Company, Sappers and Miners.
- Two sections, No. 57 Indian Stationary Hospital.

Euphrates Line (Brig.-General H. T. Brooking).

At Akaika and Suq ash Shuyukh.
- 31st Punjabis (12th Brigade).
- One section, 12th Company Sappers and Miners.

At Nasiriya :—

12th Infantry Brigade. (Brig.-General H. T. Brooking.)
- 1/5th Queen's Royal Regiment.
- 44th Infantry (under orders for Qurna and Ahwaz).
- 90th Punjabis.

34th Infantry Brigade. (Brig.-General E. C. Tidswell.)
- 2/Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment (less half battalion).
- 114th Mahrattas.
- 30th Mountain Battery.
- 1/2nd Sussex Battery, R.F.A.
- Detachment, Volunteer Artillery Battery (with four 15-pounder guns).
- 12th Cavalry (less two squadrons).

At Nasiriya (*cont.*) :—

One squadron, 33rd Cavalry.
One brigade section, No. 33 Divisional Signal Company.
One pack wireless station.
Three sections, No. 3 Field Ambulance.
No. 19 Combined Field Ambulance.

Persian Arabistan.

Band-i-qir .. .. 23rd Cavalry (less two squadrons).
Ahwaz .. .. One squadron, 23rd Cavalry.
Half, 43rd Erinpura Regiment (under orders for Nasiriya).
Two sections, No. 4 Field Ambulance.

Bushire (Brig.-General J. A. Douglas).

One squadron, 16th Cavalry.
11th Rajputs.
96th Infantry.
Three naval 12-pounder guns.
Three 7-pounder guns (Indian mountain artillery detachment).
Two Turkish mountain guns.
Two Turkish 15-pounder guns.

Basra.

General Headquarters.
Headquarters, I.G. Communications.
Base Depots.
15th Lancers (this unit may be taken as non-effective).
Two squadrons, 12th Cavalry (including one at Shaiba).
4th Rajputs (less one company).
One company, 20th Punjabis (under orders for Amara).
One section, 23rd Mountain Battery.
One flight, R.N.A.S.
Two flights, No. 30 Squadron, R.F.C.
Aircraft Park.
Malerkotla Sappers and Miners Company.
Medical Units :—
No. 22 Combined Field Ambulance.
Headquarters No. 3A British General Hospital.
No. 2 British General Hospital.
Headquarters No. 9 Indian General Hospital.
No. 10 Indian General Hospital.
No. 12 Indian General Hospital (under orders for Amara).
No. 15 Combined Clearing Hospital.
No. 20 Combined Clearing Hospital.
No. 2 X-Ray Section.
No. 3 X-Ray Section.
No. 10 Sanitary Section.
No. 8 Advanced Depot Medical Stores.
No. 6 Field Veterinary Section.
No. 18 Field Veterinary Section.
No. 2 Base Depot Veterinary Stores.
Various administrative units.

Notes.

(*a*) The headquarters and leading units of the 13th Division from Egypt arrived at Basra on the 27th February.

(*b*) By the end of February the naval flotilla on the Tigris consisted of seven gunboats of the "Firefly" class, viz., *Butterfly*, *Gadfly*, *Dragonfly*, *Cranefly*, *Grayfly*, *Mayfly* and *Sawfly*. The *Stonefly* was completed and proceeded up the Tigris early in March, as also did the *Mantis*—a river gunboat of a larger type which had been towed from England.

APPENDIX XXIII.

Fighting Strength on the evening 7th March 1916, of General Aylmer's Striking Force for Operations against the Dujaila Redoubt.

FIRST GROUP (Major-General Kemball).

COLUMN A—	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Guns.
36th Brigade—					
1/6th Devonshire	35	—	807	—	—
26th Punjabis ..	11	11	—	526	—
62nd Punjabis ..	9	5	—	271	—
82nd Punjabis ..	14	18	—	647	—
	69	34	807	1,444	—
Half Battalion 34th Pioneers	6	8	—	330	—
Section, 12th Co. Sappers and Miners	1	1	—	47	—
8th Battery, R.F.A.	4	—	183	—	6

Column A therefore totalled 2,628 rifles and 6 guns.

COLUMN B—	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks. Indian.	Guns.
9th Brigade—					
1st Highland Light Infantry ..	23	—	829	—	—
1/1st Gurkhas ..	12	16	—	777	—
1/9th Gurkhas ..	13	19	—	849	—
93rd Infantry ..	10	15	—	574	—
	58	50	829	2,200	—
28th Brigade—					
2nd Leicestershire	15	—	677	—	—
Provisional Battalion, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire Light Infantry	29	—	406	—	—
51st Sikhs ..	14	9	—	658	—
53rd Sikhs ..	13	13	—	576	—
56th Rifles ..	11	14	—	539	—
	82	36	1,083	1,773	—
9th Brigade, R.F.A.—					
19th Battery ..	5	—	232	14	6
20th Battery ..	5	—	167	15	6
28th Battery ..	5	—	157	12	6
Section, 61st Howitzer Battery ..	2	—	59	—	2
12th Co. Sappers and Miners (less two sections) ..	1	1	—	96	—

Column B therefore totalled 5,981 rifles and 20 guns, and the strength of General Kemball's command (Columns A and B) totalled 8,609 rifles and 26 guns.

SECOND GROUP (Brigadier-General Stephen).

Cavalry Brigade—	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Guns.
"S" Battery, R.H.A.	4	—	156	21	4
14th Hussars ..	20	—	302	—	—
4th Cavalry ..	12	17	—	398	—
33rd Cavalry ..	9	10	—	268	—
7th Lancers (less one squadron) ..	9	10	—	210	—

Total: 1,178 sabres and 4 guns.

THIRD GROUP (Major-General Keary).

Column C— *7th Brigade*—	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Guns.
1st Connaught Rangers ..	33	—	1,363	—	—
27th Punjabis ..	11	17	—	598	—
89th Punjabis ..	14	15	—	719	—
128th Pioneers ..	12	11	—	354	—
	70	43	1,363	1,671	—
8th Brigade—					
1st Manchester ..	30	—	1,086	—	—
2nd Rajputs ..	11	17	—	638	—
47th Sikhs ..	15	20	—	696	—
59th Rifles ..	9	19	—	621	—
	65	56	1,086	1,955	—
37th Brigade—					
1/4th Somerset Light Infantry	24	—	576	—	—
1/2nd Gurkhas ..	14	19	—	751	—
Half Battalion, 34th Pioneers ..	3	6	—	171	—
	41	25	576	922	—
13th Brigade, R.F.A.—					
2nd Battery (less one section) ..	4	—	121	—	4
4th Brigade, R.F.A.—					
7th Battery ..	5	—	185	5	6
14th Battery ..	5	—	156	7	6
66th Battery ..	4	—	173	5	6
60th Howitzer Battery	5	—	193	22	6
61st Howitzer Battery (less one section)	3	—	126	1	4
23rd Mountain Battery	4	2	2	191	4
One troop, 16th Cavalry	—	—	—	20	—

Column C therefore totalled 20 sabres, 7,583 rifles and 36 guns.

35TH BRIGADE GROUP (Brigadier-General Rice):

35th Brigade—	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Guns.
Composite Territorial Battalion ..	33	—	971	—	—
Composite Dogra Battalion ..	10	16	—	561	—
97th Infantry ..	7	4	—	174	—
102nd Grenadiers ..	9	—	—	150	—
	59	20	971	885	—
One section, 2nd Battery, R.F.A. ..	2	—	60	—	2
One squadron, 7th Lancers	2	2	—	70	—

Total: 70 sabres, 1,856 rifles and 2 guns.

DETAILED FOR PROTECTION OF SECOND LINE TRANSPORT.

	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Guns.
92nd Punjabis (37th Brigade)	11	19	—	518	—
20th Co. Sappers and Miners	5	4	5	175	—
21st Co. Sappers and Miners	4	4	5	140	—

Total: 843 rifles.

GRAND TOTALS.

Actual Striking Force—	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Guns.
Columns A and B ..	238	130	3,517	5,931	26
Cavalry Brigade ..	54	37	458	897	4
Column C	206	126	3,981	4,799	36
	498	293	7,956	11,627	66

i.e., a total fighting strength of 20,374 men and 66 guns, or a strength of 1,198 sabres, 16,192 rifles and 66 guns.

	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Guns.
35th Brigade Group ..	63	22	1,031	955	2
Protection of Second Line Transport ..	20	27	10	833	—
	83	49	1,041	1,788	2

GRAND TOTAL: 23,335 fighting men and 68 guns, or a strength of 1,268 sabres, 18,891 rifles and 68 guns.

APPENDIX XXIV.*

6th March 1916.

TIGRIS CORPS ORDER No. 26.

1. Latest information re enemy is being issued separately.

2. The intention of the Corps Commander is to turn the right flank of the Es Sinn position by seizing the Dujaila redoubt and following this up by capturing the whole position.

3. To give effect to the above, the following operations will be carried out by the troops shown below :—

Cavalry Brigade.

3rd Division {
- 7th, 8th and 9th Brigades.
- One troop, 16th Cavalry.
- 20th and 21st Companies, Sappers and Miners.
- 4th Brigade, R.F.A., and 60th Howitzer Battery.

28th Brigade.
35th Brigade.
36th Brigade.
37th Brigade (consisting of 1/4th Somerset, 92nd Punjabis, 1/2nd Gurkhas and 34th Pioneers).
9th Brigade, R.F.A.
13th Brigade, R.F.A. (less one battery).
61st Howitzer Battery.
23rd Mountain Battery (less one section).
12th Co. Sappers and Miners (less one section).

7th Division.
Units—
19th Brigade (less 92nd Punjabis).
21st Brigade.
16th Cavalry (less one troop).
107th Pioneers.
3rd Co. Sappers and Miners.
Attached—
36th Sikhs.
13th Co. Sappers and Miners.
1/1st and 1/3rd Sussex Batteries.
44th Battery, R.F.A.
72nd and 77th Batteries.
One section 104th Battery.
Details.
Gunboats.

4. The troops marginally noted, under the command of Major-General Younghusband, will contain the enemy in the Hanna position and protect Wadi camps and bridge over Tigris.

* See Map 18, which is a copy of part of the map (T.C.4) issued to the troops and which is referred to in this operation order.

5. The troops mentioned in paragraph 3 above (less those already there) *will move to the area now occupied by the 3rd Division* after dusk on the 6th March with the following exceptions :—

Cavalry Brigade.
One company of the 3rd Division at Arab Village.
36th Brigade.
37th Brigade.
23rd Mountain Battery (less one section).
Two companies of the 35th Brigade at sandhills and escort to guns.
All artillery east of the Senna canal on the 6th March.

The above exceptions will move forward after dusk on the 7th March to join the formations referred to below at their respective rendezvous.

35th Brigade.
One squadron cavalry, to be detailed by G.O.C., Cavalry Brigade.
One section, 2nd Battery, R.F.A.
20th Combined Field Ambulance.

6. The G.O.C. 35th Brigade, with force as per margin, will take up a position after dusk on the 7th March on the line 15–a–7–8/24–a–9–4, so as to cover the rendezvous of troops in paragraph 7 below.

7. Remaining troops will rendezvous, in the following groups and in the order shown, after dusk on 7th March in the vicinity of the junction of squares 16–c and 24–b. Rendezvous for each group will be marked and all groups will be in their respective positions by 8.30 p.m.

(i) *Under command of Major-General Kemball.*

Column A—
36th Brigade.
8th Battery, R.F.A.
One section, 12th Co. Sappers and Miners, with four canvas boats.
21st Combined Field Ambulance.
Wing, 34th Pioneers (attached temporarily).

Column B—
9th Brigade.
One Indian field ambulance (to be detailed by G.O.C. 3rd Division).
28th Brigade.
19th British Field Ambulance.
9th Brigade, R.F.A.
One section, 61st Howitzer Battery.
12th Co. Sappers and Miners (less two sections).
Half a British field ambulance (to be detailed by G.O.C., 3rd Division).
129th Indian Field Ambulance (from 7th Division).

(ii) *Under command of Brigadier-General Stephen.*

Cavalry Brigade (less one squadron).
Cavalry Brigade Field Ambulance.

(iii) *Under command of Major-General Keary.*

Column C—

37th Brigade (less 1½ battalions).
Two sections, 3rd Combined Field Ambulance.
7th Brigade.
8th Brigade.
4th Brigade, R.F.A.
13th Brigade, R.F.A. (less two batteries and one section).
60th Howitzer Battery.
61st Howitzer Battery (less one section).
23rd Mountain Battery (less one section).
One and a half British field ambulances. } to be detailed by G.O.C., 3rd Division
Two Indian field ambulances }

Field ambulances and the first line transport of all the above will march with units.

8. The groups referred to in paragraph 7 above will march from their respective rendezvous in the order already shown, one behind the other, and under the arrangements of their respective commanders. Leading group under the orders of Major-General Kemball will move off at 9 p.m., directed on to the vicinity of 33–a–5–5 (general bearing 206° magnetic).

The march formations to be adopted by the various columns are given in Annexure A. These are given as a guide only, but should be adopted as far as circumstances and the ground permit.

Halts (irrespective of those for other reasons) will be made as under :—

at 10 p.m. for 15 minutes ;
at 11 p.m. for 10 minutes ;
at 12 midnight for 10 minutes ;

and so on.

9. On reaching the vicinity of 33–a–5–5, the whole force will halt.

10. Columns A and B will then proceed under the orders of Major-General Kemball so as to reach the bend of the Dujaila depression in the north-west corner of 41–b by 6.15 a.m. on the 8th March. Any hostile encampments will be cleared *en route*.

The above columns will be followed by the Cavalry Brigade in its previous march formation.

11. On reaching the bend referred to in paragraph 10 above, the following operations will be carried out :—

(*a*) *Cavalry Brigade* will push forward on the left of the 36th Brigade towards square 31–d and will cover its left flank and the left rear of the remainder of General Kemball's force.

A special officer's patrol will be detailed to report on the ford at Hamidiya, in 40–d.

(*b*) *Column B* under Major-General Kemball will be formed up in readiness to assault the Dujaila position.

(*c*) *Column A* (i.e., the 36th Brigade, 8th Battery, R.F.A., and one section 12th Company Sappers and Miners) will be detached by General Kemball to cover

and protect the left flank of the two brigades of Column B, which will actually carry out the assault.

Column A will not take part in the assault itself.

(*Note.*—The wing of the 34th Pioneers will remain in reserve with B Column until it can be returned to the 37th Brigade. This should be done at first favourable opportunity.)

12. The G.O.C., Column C, will take the following action in sufficient time to enable all the artillery with Column C to come into action by 6.15 a.m. about 3,500 yards from the enemy's position from Dujaila redoubt to Sinn Abtar redoubt. (The B.G.R.A. will select the actual positions for the artillery, in the vicinity of 32–b–3–6, which will then come under the direct orders of the Corps Commander) :—

(*a*) Detach the 37th Brigade to carry out the following operation. Two battalions and the machine guns of the two and a half battalions to move forward and occupy by 6.15 a.m. a position about 32–d–0–2 within effective machine gun range of the enemy's position at the Dujaila redoubt: the remaining half battalion following in reserve. When this position has been reached, this brigade will come under the direct orders of the Corps Commander.

The two forward battalions will further co-operate with Column B in the assault by pushing their infantry attack to within 500 yards of the enemy's position, the left of this attack being directed on the south end of the Dujaila redoubt. The G.O.C., 37th Brigade, will arrange that the above attack is so timed as to synchronise with the assault made by General Kemball on the above redoubt vide 11 (*b*) above—the half battalion will still be kept back in reserve.

(*b*) Move forward one brigade of the 3rd Division to the vicinity of 32–b–2–10 to a position of readiness to assault the Sinn Abtar redoubt. The first line of leading battalions and the machine guns of this brigade will move to within effective machine gun range of the enemy's entrenchments by 6.15 a.m.

The other brigade and its machine guns will be formed up and held in reserve on the right rear of the guns about 32–b–4–4 by 6.15 a.m.

13. The G.O.C., 35th Brigade, will keep his force in the position assigned to him for the night 7th/8th March until 8th March, when he will concentrate on his left ready to march at 6 a.m. on the flank of the transport and ammunition columns, referred to in paragraph 14 below, to 33–a–5–5. On arrival at 33–a–5–5 the G.O.C., 35th Brigade, will continue to protect the above transport, etc.

14. The second line transport of the whole force and ammunition columns will be formed up under the direction of the A.A. and Q.M.G. Corps, and will remain during the night of the 7th/8th in an area which is being selected for this purpose in square 16–c under the following escort :—

One battalion of not less than 500 rifles (to be detailed by G.O.C., 37th Brigade).

20th and 21st Companies, Sappers and Miners.

At 5.30 a.m. on the 8th March the above will march under the orders of Lieutenant-Colonel Herbert, commanding Ammunition Column, to 33–a–5–5. On arrival at this point the transport and ammunition columns will be halted.

The G.O.C., 35th Brigade, will make necessary dispositions for the protection of the above, as already stated.

15. Arrangements for the carriage of small arm ammunition and hand-grenades will be as follows :—

(*a*) *Ammunition*—

Column A—300 rounds per man will accompany the column.

Columns B and C—250 rounds per man will accompany the column. 25 rounds per man will be carried in the ammunition column.

(*b*) *Hand-grenades*—Two pack mules per battalion and one cart per brigade for the carriage of hand-grenades will be detailed to accompany the first line transport of each brigade.

16. After the Dujaila redoubt has been captured, a main collecting station for all wounded will be established in the vicinity of the above redoubt.

17. Depending on circumstances, the action to be taken by General Kemball after he has taken the Dujaila redoubt will be as follows :—

(*a*) He will push forward with his right along the enemy's entrenchments, covered by the fire of the Corps artillery and the machine guns of the 37th Brigade and "C" Column, towards the Sinn Abtar redoubt; but he will not cross the Dujaila depression in 32–a.

(*b*) Column A, while continuing to protect General Kemball's left, will move forward to a position of readiness for further operations to the vicinity of 31–d–7–2.

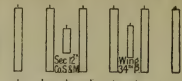
18. The enemy's aeroplanes may endeavour to give trouble by bombing any close formations. Units in reserve, or which are temporarily kept back, should be prepared to fire on hostile aeroplanes with maxims and rifles—so as to keep them at a respectable distance—and lie down if a hostile aeroplane passes over them.

19. All reports to head of "C" Column up to 5 a.m. on 8th March—subsequently to a position on the left of the Corps artillery.

COLUMNS "A" & "B."

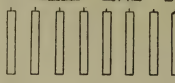
Battalion in line of half company columns in fours.

Three battalions in line of half battalion columns in fours, with section 12th Coy. S. & M. and wing 34th Pioneers (for improving roads), as shown.



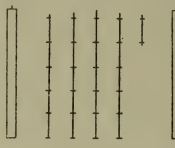
36th Brigade & Sec. 12th Coy. S. & M., with wing 34th Pioneers (attached temporarily).

Four battalions in line of half battalion columns in fours.



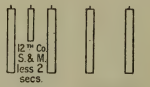
9th Brigade.

One battalion in column of route on each flank. Between the battalions 4 batteries and 1 section, each in column of route.



28th Brigade.
9th Brigade, R.F.A.
8th Battery, R.F.A.
1 section, 61st How. Battery.

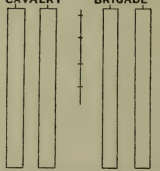
Two battalions in line of half battalion columns in fours, and 12th Coy. S. & M. (less 2 sections) as shown.



12th Coy. S. & M. (less 2 sections).

CAVALRY BRIGADE

Regiments in line of regimental column of troops, with "S" Bty. in column of route in the centre.

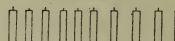


Cavalry Brigade.

CORPS HEADQUARTERS

COLUMN "C"

Two and a half battalions in line of company columns in fours.

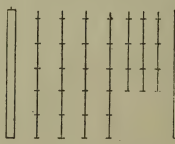


37th Brigade (less 1½ battalions).

Four battalions in line of half battalion columns in fours.

7th Brigade.

One battalion in column of route on each flank. Between these battalions, 7 batteries (less 3 sections), each in column of route.



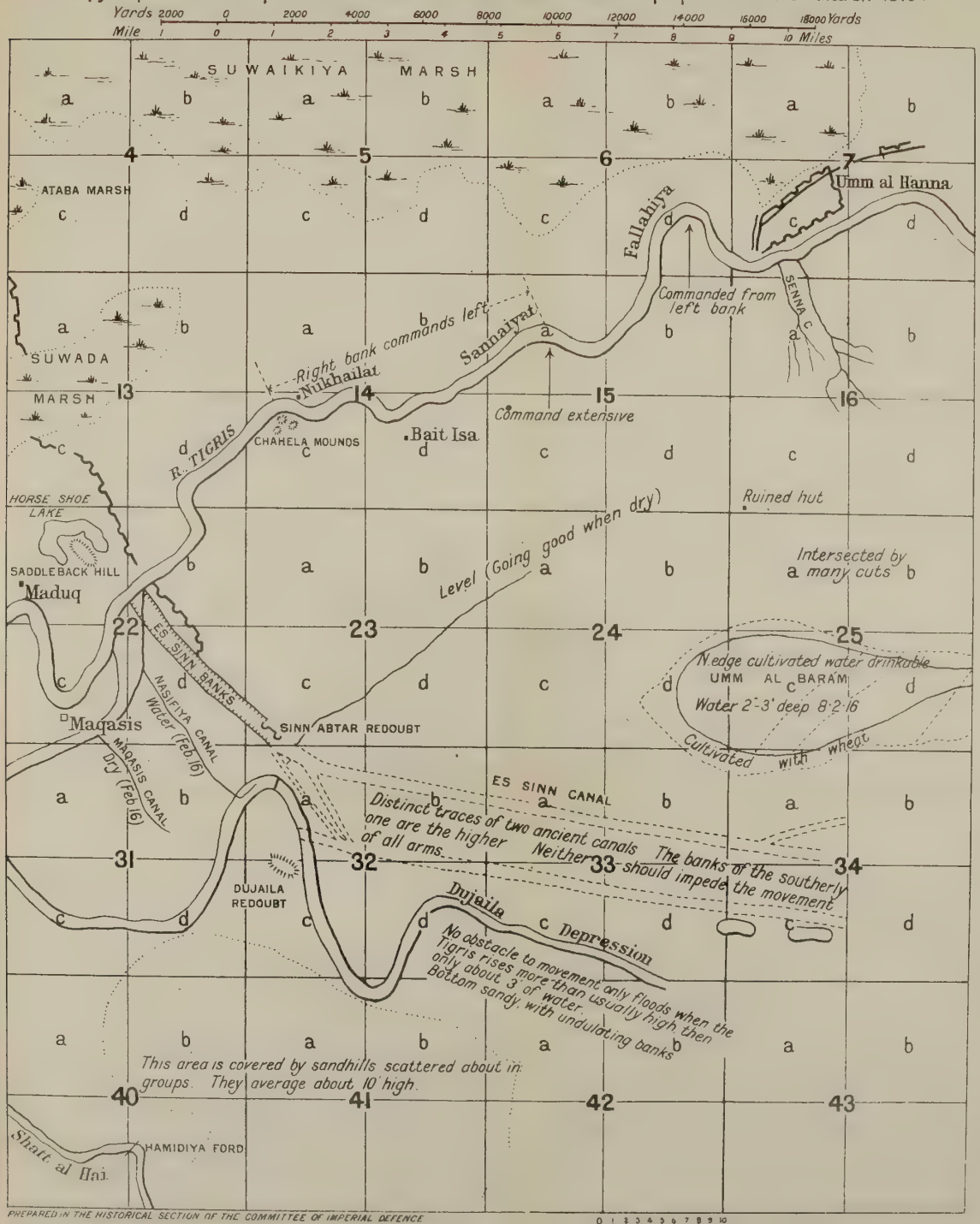
8th Brigade.
4th Brigade, R.F.A.
13th Brigade, R.F.A. (less 2 batteries and 1 section).
60th How. Bty., R.F.A.
61st How. Bty., R.F.A. (less 1 section).
23rd Mtn. Bty. (less 1 section).

Two battalions in line of half battalion columns in fours.

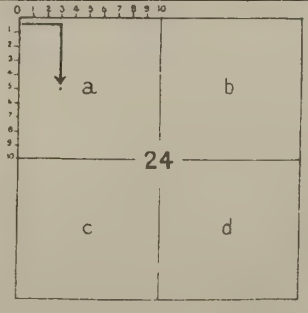
NOTE.—(1.) Intervals and distances will be such as to maintain touch laterally and from front to rear, without expending men in connecting files.

(2.) 1st Line Transport and Field Ambulances have not been shown above. These will be either fitted in between columns or march in rear of brigades on as broad a front as possible.

To illustrate Tigris Corps Operation Order No. 26 dated 6th March 1916 *(see Appendix XXIV)* This is a copy of part of the map (T.C.4.) which had been issued to the troops prior to the 6th March 1916.


Yards 2000 0 2000 4000 6000 8000 10000 12000 14000 16000 18000 Yards
Mile 1 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Miles
SUWAIKIYA MARSH
ATABA MARSH
SUWADA MARSH
Umm al Hanna
Fallahiya
Commanded from left bank
SENNA C.
Right bank commands left
Nukhailat
Sannaiyat
Command extensive
R. TIGRIS
CHAHELA MOUNDS
Bait Isa
HORSE SHOE LAKE
SADDLEBACK HILL
Maduq
Ruined hut
Level (Going good when dry)
Intersected by many cuts
ES SINN BANKS
NASIFIYA CANAL Water (Feb 16)
MAQASIS CANAL Dry (Feb 16)
Maqasis
SINN ABTAR REDOUBT
N. edge cultivated water drinkable
UMM AL BARAM
Water 2'-3' deep 8·2·16
Cultivated with wheat
ES SINN CANAL
Distinct traces of two ancient canals The banks of the southerly one are the higher Neither should impede the movement of all arms.
DUJAILA REDOUBT
Dujaila Depression
No obstacle to movement only floods when the Tigris rises more than usually high, then only about 3' of water Bottom sandy, with undulating banks
This area is covered by sandhills scattered about in groups. They average about 10' high.
Shatt al Hai
HAMIDIYA FORD
4 5 6 7 13 14 15 16 22 23 24 25 31 32 33 34 40 41 42 43

PREPARED IN THE HISTORICAL SECTION OF THE COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE



NOTE. *The system used in the operation order for indicating points in the small squares is as follows The sides of each small square are considered to be divided into ten parts and these points joined up. To find a point in the small square, a start is made at the top left hand corner; a line is then carried first due east and then due south. e.g., 24·a·3·5.*

Ordnance Survey, 1917

APPENDIX XXV.

British Casualties during the Operations of the 8th and 9th March 1916 against the Dujaila Redoubt.

TROOPS UNDER GENERAL KEMBALL ON THE 8TH MARCH.

	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Total.	Percentage of Casualties to Strength.
36th Brigade—					
1/6th Devonshire ..	31	148	29	208	24
26th Punjabis	8	93	6	107	19
62nd Punjabis	3	36	6	45	17
82nd Punjabis	19	168	37	224	30
	61	445	78	584	24
9th Brigade—					
1st Highland Light Infantry	52	193	19	264	30
1/1st Gurkhas	21	99	6	126	15
1/9th Gurkhas	31	112	4	147	16
93rd Infantry	32	155	3	190	31
	136	559	32	727	23
28th Brigade—					
Brigade Headquarters ..	—	2	—	2	—
2nd Leicestershire ..	16	137	16	169	24
Provisional Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry	1	3	5	9	—
51st Sikhs	4	54	1	59	8
53rd Sikhs	37	137	19	193	32
56th Rifles	42	114	3	159	28
	100	447	44	591	—
34th Sikh Pioneers (less half battalion)	—	—	—	*Nil.*	—
12th Co. Sappers and Miners (less one section) ..	—	—	—	*Nil.*	—
8th Battery, R.F.A. ..	—	12	—	12	—
Headquarters, 9th Brigade, R.F.A.	—	1	—	1	—
19th Battery, R.F.A. ..	1	5	—	6	—
20th Battery, R.F.A. ..	2	16	—	18	—
28th Battery, R.F.A. ..	1	4	—	5	—
Section, 61st Howitzer Battery	—	—	—	*Nil.*	—

TROOPS UNDER GENERAL KEARY ON THE 8TH MARCH.

7th Brigade—	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Total.	Percentage of Casualties to Strength.
Brigade Headquarters ..	—	1	—	1	—
1st Connaught Rangers ..	2	15	—	17	—
27th Punjabis	1	29	—	30	—
89th Punjabis	—	10	—	10	—
128th Pioneers	—	13	—	13	—
	3	68	—	71	—
8th Brigade—					
Brigade Headquarters ..	—	1	—	1	—
1st Manchester	27	247	181	455	40
2nd Rajputs	86	189	48	323	48
47th Sikhs	7	107	8	122	16
59th Rifles	45	116	12	173	26
	165	660	249	1,074	33
23rd Mountain Battery ..	—	—	—	*Nil.*	—
CAVALRY BRIGADE.					
"S" Battery, R.H.A. ..	1	2	—	3	—
14th Hussars	—	—	—	*Nil.*	—
4th Cavalry	5	8	—	13	—
7th Lancers	—	3	—	3	—
33rd Cavalry	1	16	3	20	—
	7	29	3	39	—

TROOPS DIRECTLY UNDER GENERAL AYLMER'S ORDERS ON 8TH MARCH.

37th Brigade—	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Total.	Percentage of Casualties to Strength.
Brigade Headquarters ..	—	1	1	2	—
1/4th Somerset Light Infantry	12	55	6	73	—
1/2nd Gurkhas	22	113	75	210	26
Half Battalion, 34th Pioneers	—	—	—	*Nil.*	—
92nd Punjabis	—	—	—	*Nil.*	—
	34	169	82	285	—

TROOPS DIRECTLY UNDER GENERAL AYLMER'S ORDERS ON 8TH MARCH—*contd.*

	Killed.	Wounded.	Missing.	Total.	Percentage of Casualties to Strength.
35th Brigade—					
Brigade Headquarters ..	1	2	—	3	—
Composite Territorial Battalion	—	7	2	9	—
Composite Dogra Battalion	1	14	—	15	—
97th Infantry	—	1	—	1	—
102nd Grenadiers ..	—	—	1	1	—
	2	24	3	29	—
Headquarters, 13th Brigade, R.F.A.	—	1	—	1	—
2nd Battery, R.F.A. ..	—	—	—	*Nil.*	—
4th Brigade, R.F.A.—					
7th Battery, R.F.A. ..	—	—	—	*Nil.*	—
14th Battery, R.F.A. ..	—	4	—	4	—
66th Battery, R.F.A. ..	—	9	—	9	—
60th Howitzer Battery ..	—	—	—	*Nil.*	—
61st Howitzer Battery (less one section)	—	4	—	4	—
20th Co. Sappers and Miners	—	8	2	10	—
21st Co. Sappers and Miners	—	—	—	*Nil.*	—
Transport personnel ..	—	—	3	3	—
Medical personnel	—	—	1	1	—

GRAND TOTAL OF CASUALTIES: Killed 512, Wounded 2,465, Missing 497 = 3,474.

APPENDIX XXVI.

Effective Fighting Strength of the Tigris Corps on the 5th April 1916.

3RD DIVISION (Major-General H. d'U. Keary).

	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Total.
7th Brigade (Major-Gen. R. G. Egerton)—					
1st Connaught Rangers	23	—	1,112	—	1,135
27th Punjabis ..	12	14	—	480	506
89th Punjabis ..	10	14	—	443	467
128th Pioneers ..	9	12	—	305	326
	54	40	1,112	1,228	2,434
8th Brigade (Brig.-Gen. S. M. Edwardes)—					
1st Manchester ..	17	—	608	—	625
2nd Rajputs ..	7	11	—	252	270
47th Sikhs	13	17	—	607	637
59th Rifles	6	10	—	443	459
	43	38	608	1,302	1,991
9th Brigade (Lieut.-Col. L. W. Y. Campbell)—					
1st Highland Light Infantry	19	—	526	—	545
93rd Infantry ..	9	10	—	357	376
1/1st Gurkhas ..	10	13	—	627	650
1/9th Gurkhas ..	10	12	—	621	643
	48	35	526	1,605	2,214
37th Brigade (Brig.-Gen. F. J. Fowler)—					
1/4th Somerset Light Infantry	15	—	471	—	486
1/2nd Gurkhas ..	9	12	—	508	529
36th Sikhs	13	18	—	639	670
	37	30	471	1,147	1,685

	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Total.	Guns.
Divisional Troops—						
34th Sikh Pioneers ..	10	13	—	512	535	—
20th Co. Sappers and Miners	4	4	4	163	175	—
21st Co. Sappers and Miners	4	4	5	132	145	—
Two squadrons, 33rd Cavalry	4	6	—	154	164	—

3RD DIVISION (Major-General H. d'U. Keary)—*contd.*

	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Total.	Guns.
4th Brigade, R.F.A.—						
7th Battery ..	4	—	180	5	189	6
14th Battery ..	4	—	159	5	168	6
66th Battery ..	6	—	188	5	199	6
A/69th Battery (Howitzers)	5	—	133	—	138	4
23rd Mountain Battery	4	2	—	196	202	4

TOTAL, 3RD DIVISION: 154 sabres, 8,815 rifles and 26 guns.

7TH DIVISION (Major-General Sir G. Younghusband).

	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Total.
19th Brigade (Brig.-Gen. E. C. Peebles)—					
Highland Battalion*	36	—	871	—	907
28th Punjabis ..	6	11	—	344	361
92nd Punjabis ..	13	11	—	480	504
125th Rifles ..	13	10	—	665	688
	68	32	871	1,489	2,460
21st Brigade (Brig.-Gen. C. E. Norie)—					
English Battalion†	62	—	993	—	1,055
6th Jats	6	7	—	246	259
9th Bhopal Infantry	10	14	—	487	511
Mahratta Battalion‡	9	3	—	408	420
	87	24	993	1,141	2,245
28th Brigade (Major-Gen. G. V. Kemball)—					
2nd Leicestershire ..	19	—	807	—	826
Provisional Battalion Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry	25	—	389	—	414
51st Sikhs	11	12	—	568	591
53rd Sikhs	12	10	—	386	408
56th Rifles	9	14	—	370	393
	76	36	1,196	1,324	2,632

* i.e., 2nd Black Watch and 1st Seaforth Highlanders temporarily amalgamated.

† i.e., Composite battalion composed of drafts for 2nd Dorsetshire and 2nd Norfolk in Kut.

‡ i.e., Composed of drafts for Mahratta battalions in Kut.

Divisional Troops—	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Total.	Guns.
107th Pioneers ..	15	17	—	561	593	—
3rd Co. Sappers and Miners	3	3	3	154	163	—
16th Cavalry ..	6	11	—	178	195	—
9th Brigade, R.F.A.—						
19th Battery ..	5	—	168	14	187	6
20th Battery ..	5	—	174	16	195	6
28th Battery ..	5	—	107	12	124	6
72nd Heavy Battery..	4	—	127	96	227	4

TOTAL, 7TH DIVISION: 178 sabres, 7,732 rifles and 22 guns.

13TH DIVISION (Major-General F. S. Maude).

38th Brigade (Brig.-Gen. J. W. O'Dowda)—	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Total.
6th King's Own Royal Regt. ..	29	—	816	—	845
6th East Lancashire	30	—	821	—	851
6th South Lancashire	28	—	782	—	810
6th Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire)	33	—	995	—	1,028
	120	—	3,414	—	3,534
39th Brigade (Brig.-Gen. W. de S. Cayley)—					
9th Royal Warwickshire	34	—	829	—	863
9th Worcestershire	28	—	746	—	774
7th North Staffordshire	30	—	925	—	955
	92	—	2,500	—	2,592
40th Brigade (Brig.-Gen. A. C. Lewin)—					
8th Cheshire ..	29	—	791	—	820
8th Royal Welch Fusiliers	29	—	616	—	645
4th South Wales Borderers ..	28	—	385	—	413
5th Wiltshire ..	34	—	1,013	—	1,047
	120	—	2,805	—	2,925

Divisional Troops—	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Total.	Guns.
8th Welch Regiment (Pioneers) ..	21	—	827	—	848	—
88th Company R.E.	8	—	239	—	247	—
72nd Company R.E.	7	—	230	—	237	—
66th Brigade, R.F.A.—						
A/66th Battery ..	4	—	136	4	144	4
B/66th Battery ..	5	—	134	—	139	4
C/66th Battery (less one section) ..	3	—	60	6	69	2
D/66th Battery ..	4	—	132	3	139	4
69th Brigade, R.F.A.— (Howitzers)—						
D/69th Battery ..	5	—	129	6	140	4
Heavy Brigade, R.G.A.—						
77th Heavy Battery	5	—	125	47	177	4
One section 1/104th Heavy Battery ..	2	—	37	34	73	2

TOTAL, 13TH DIVISION: 10,015 rifles and 24 guns.

CORPS TROOPS.

35th Brigade—	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Total.
Composite Territorial Battalion* ..	48	—	859	—	907
Composite Dogra Battalion† ..	15	15	—	522	552
97th Infantry ..	6	4	—	174	184
102nd Grenadiers ..	7	4	—	188	199
	76	23	859	884	1,842
36th Brigade—					
1/6th Devonshire ..	22	—	624	—	646
26th Punjabis ..	9	7	—	414	430
62nd Punjabis ..	8	5	—	257	270
82nd Punjabis ..	13	13	—	386	412
	52	25	—	1,057	1,758

* Amalgamation of 1/5th Buffs and 1/4th Hampshire.

† Amalgamation of 37th and 41st Dogras.

	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.	Total.	Guns.
16th Cavalry (two squadrons)	?	?	?	?	?	—
12th Co. Sappers and Miners	3	1	2	121	127	—
13th Co. Sappers and Miners	4	3	1	129	137	—
One company, 12th Pioneers	4	1	—	118	123	—
13th Brigade, R.F.A.—						
2nd Battery ..	6	—	178	—	184	6
8th Battery ..	4	—	173	—	177	6
44th Battery ..	5	—	179	—	184	6
69th Brigade, R.F.A. (Howitzers)—						
B/69th Battery ..	6	—	141	—	147	4
C/69th Battery ..	5	—	133	—	138	4
Home Counties Brigade, R.F.A.—						
1/1st Sussex Battery	5	—	131	9	145	4
1/3rd Sussex Battery	4	—	134	14	152	4
60th Howitzer Battery	6	—	181	9	196	6
61st Howitzer Battery	6	—	187	—	193	6
60-pounder Brigade—						
2/86th Battery, R.G.A.	4	—	81	—	85	4
2/104th Battery, R.G.A.	4	—	83	—	87	4
One 6-inch Howitzer ..	—	—	—	—	—	1
						55

Cavalry Brigade—
"S" Battery, R.H.A. .. ..
14th Hussars .. .. ..
4th Cavalry .. .. ..
7th Lancers .. .. ..
33rd Cavalry (less two squadrons)
} No information regarding strengths; but all units were weak.

Excluding the Cavalry Brigade, the effective fighting strength of the Tigris Corps on the morning of the 5th April 1916 totalled 332 sabres, 30,357 rifles and 127 guns.

In addition, the following units were collected at Shaikh Saad :—
One section, C/66th Battery, R.F.A. (of 13th Divisional Artillery).
1/4th Devonshire Regiment (41st Brigade).
64th Pioneers (37th Brigade).
Half battalion, 2/4th Gurkhas (41st Brigade).
Half battalion, 3rd Brahmans
One company, 67th Punjabis } Post garrison.
One 15-pounder gun .. ..

APPENDIX XXVII.

Effective Strengths on the 16th April 1916 of the Infantry, Pioneers and Sappers of the British 3rd and 13th Divisions.

3RD DIVISION.

	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.
7th Brigade—				
1st Connaught Rangers ..	24	—	1,070	—
27th Punjabis	12	14	—	477
89th Punjabis	8	13	—	336
128th Pioneers	10	12	—	301
	54	39	1,070	1,114
8th Brigade—				
1st Manchester Regiment ..	22	—	607	—
2nd Rajputs	7	11	—	281
47th Sikhs	13	19	—	577
59th Rifles	7	8	—	402
	49	38	607	1,260
9th Brigade—				
1st Highland Light Infantry	29	—	531	—
93rd Infantry..	10	10	—	361
1/1st Gurkhas	10	13	—	622
1/9th Gurkhas	13	16	—	612
	62	39	531	1,595
37th Brigade—				
1/4th Somerset Light Infantry	13	—	447	—
1/2nd Gurkhas	8	12	—	500
36th Sikhs	9	7	—	428
	30	19	447	928
34th Sikh Pioneers	10	13	—	508
20th Co. Sappers and Miners ..	4	4	4	157
21st Co. Sappers and Miners ..	4	4	4	137

TOTAL number of rifles—8,362.

13TH DIVISION.

	British Officers.	Other Ranks, British
38th Brigade—		
6th King's Own Royal Regiment	15	602
6th East Lancashire Regiment	11	490
6th South Lancashire Regiment	12	528
6th Loyal Regiment (North Lancashire) ..	12	484
	50	2,104
39th Brigade—		
9th Royal Warwickshire Regiment	14	509
9th Worcestershire Regiment	6	522
7th North Staffordshire Regiment	9	495
	29	1,526
40th Brigade—		
8th Cheshire Regiment	13	411
8th Royal Welch Fusiliers	10	317
4th South Wales Borderers	2	295
5th Wiltshire Regiment	4	503
	29	1,526
8th Welch Regiment (Pioneers)	21	800
72nd Company, R.E.	7	230
88th Company, R.E.	8	232

TOTAL number of rifles—6,418.

APPENDIX XXVIII.

Effective Strength on the morning 22nd April 1916 of the Infantry, Pioneers and Sappers of the British 7th Division.

	British Officers.	Indian Officers.	Other Ranks, British.	Other Ranks, Indian.
19th Brigade—				
Highland Battalion	39	—	1,258	—
28th Punjabis	3	5	—	248
92nd Punjabis	8	9	—	329
125th Rifles	8	4	—	330
	58	18	1,258	907
21st Brigade—				
English Battalion	40	—	816	—
6th Jats	8	5	—	173
9th Bhopal Infantry ..	8	7	—	410
1/8th Gurkhas	10	17	—	791
	66	29	816	1,374
28th Brigade—				
2nd Leicestershire Regiment	6	—	456	—
Provisional Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry	16	—	219	—
51st Sikhs	3	4	—	316
53rd Sikhs	9	4	—	273
56th Rifles	6	10	—	347
	40	18	675	936
107th Pioneers	16	17	—	515
3rd Co. Sappers and Miners ..	4	3	3	149

TOTAL number of rifles—6,633.

APPENDIX XXIX.

Some Extracts from the Diary of Captain A. J. Shakeshaft, 2nd Norfolk Regiment.

"*16th May* (Baghdad). Colonel Chitty and I went to see Major Amin Bey.* We found him most charming and really eager to help us . . . .

"*17th May*. . . . . More parties of officers came up from Shumran . . . . The troops soon began to arrive, a dreadful spectacle . . . . to see British troops in rags, many barefooted, starved and sick wending their way under brutal Arab guards through an Eastern bazaar . . . . From men in hospital I heard many stories of the horrors of the march from Shumran . . . . General Melliss kept me quite busy writing letters on the subject to those in authority; they were of course never answered . . . .

"(*Date ?*) The Turkish Minister of War, Enver Pasha, came to Baghdad during our stay. I did not see him. He inspected some of the men near the station and ordered that they should be given a ration of tea. They received it for two or three days, then 'finish,' as our guards say . . . .

"(*Date ?*) The General (Melliss) was now quite well again and was asking to take the road and reach his final destination. He informed Major Amin Bey and arrangements were accordingly made . . . .

"*June 8th*. On this day, so far as I can remember, we left Baghdad . . . .

"*June 10th*. . . . . At about 11 a.m. reached the Arab town of Tikrit, a miserable place, standing on high undulating ground. We met a number of unfortunate British and Indian soldiers who were standing at the door of a miserable yard, where they were herded together. They looked ghastly. They were sick left behind by one of the columns . . . . After unloading our kits we went round to see the men. They were in a miserable plight, many suffering from dysentery. Others were fairly fit, but had no boots for marching. There were about 80 British and Indian. They received only a ration of wheat. The Arabs used to bring milk and eggs to sell and asked exorbitant prices; consequently they would soon have no money and would die of starvation and neglect. There were no guards over them and they were completely abandoned. Sometimes, when a sick man would crawl out of the hovel they lived in, Arabs would throw stones and chase him back into the yard. I will spare the reader any description of the dark, filthy hovel where they slept . . . .

"General Melliss was very much upset at what he had seen and sent for the commandant, an Arab captain. He was hopeless and nothing could be got out of him. I wrote a long letter for the General to Halil Pasha exposing the case, but I doubt if it was ever sent. We spent the evening with the men. Baines (a medical officer) did his best for the sick and we gave them some clothes and the General left some gold with them . . . .

"*13th June*. . . . . While we were looking at the excavations (at Sharqat), an assistant surgeon came and asked us to go to the *serai* at once. We found a large number of men lying in some outhouses in a most pitiful condition. Most of them were slowly dying of dysentery and neglect . . . . General Melliss left some gold and all the cigarettes he had. As I was leaving a room, behind the General, a man called me and said: 'May God bless your General, sir, for he has brightened the last hours of a dying man.' It was the same story everywhere—Turkish neglect and absolute indifference to the sufferings of our helpless men . . . .

"*16th June*. . . . . arrived Mosul . . . .

"*17th June*. I went round the barracks and hospital with the General. There were only a few convalescents in the barracks, except British and Indian officers. The food for the men appeared good . . . . but they

* The Turkish writer frequently quoted in this narrative.

did not get enough of it. Most of them looked half starved and very ill. The place was in a filthy condition and words would fail to express the sanitary arrangements . . . . Went to the hospital. There were about 80 men there under Captain Spackman. All the men were very well looked after, every man had a bed and were all in clean rooms. The Turkish P.M.O. seemed to do his best to assist and promised the General to let Spackman have some more beds, as a number of men in barracks were looking very ill . . . .

" In the evening a number of British and Indian troops left, *en route* for Ras al Ain. Before they went the General insisted that Baines should inspect them and he sent a number back to hospital.

" *20th June.* (Left Mosul *en route* for Ras al Ain) . . . . We started off about 4.30 a.m. Early in the morning we passed a German machine gun section, admirably turned out: all the section was mounted . . . . At about 9 a.m. we arrived on the banks of a stream, where the water was fairly good. We halted at the stream and a British soldier came and told us that there were about half a dozen of his comrades in a room at the post, two of whom were dangerously ill. We went in and found six British soldiers in a fearfully emaciated condition lying in a filthy stable. Of course, the Turks had done nothing for them. One of the men said: ' We are like rats in a trap and they are just slowly killing us.' They said that the German machine gun section had been most kind to them. The officers had given them money ; the men had given them part of their rations. The General gave some gold to the senior of the party and Baines did what he could for the worst cases, two men who were very near death. We saw the senior Turkish official in charge of the post, a warrant officer. He was quite useless and could do nothing . . . .

" *21st June.* . . . . As soon as we arrived at Ras al Ain . . . . the General asked to see the commandant . . . . The commandant was a colonel. When we entered, he was reclining on a divan smoking a *hookah*. He at once got up, addressed us in good French and offered cigarettes and coffee. The General told me to tell him all we had seen on the way from Baghdad and to ask him to wire to Halil Pasha to have carts sent for our unfortunate men dying by the wayside. He refused, as he was not in Halil's command. The General then told him to wire to Aleppo. Another evasive reply . . . .

" *22nd June.* We reached Aleppo (by train from Ras al Ain) about 9 a.m. After lunch we drove up to the barracks to interview the Turkish commander . . . . Presently Shefket Pasha entered . . . . The General then exposed the lamentable state of our men on the road and offered to pay for a telegram to Baghdad to ask them to send carts and pick up all the isolated parties. Shefket Pasha would not hear of this and wrote out a telegram himself and promised to send it. He also said he would do his utmost to better the condition of our men . . . .

" *23rd June.* Arrived at Islahiya . . . . a German warrant officer came and told me that there were a number of British troops suffering from dysentery in some Arab tents near by. The German had been to see them several times, but the Turks had warned him off and said that the men had cholera—a lie. He said that they were being starved to death. The General sent Baines to investigate this case, and Halim (Turkish interpreter with General Melliss's party) and self went to interview the commandant. The assistant surgeon came up from the prisoners and bore out what the German had told me. I then went with the General to the commandant to expose the case and ask him to have a telegram sent to Aleppo. He agreed to everything and said he would send a wire, but I doubt it . . . . The General sent me off to thank the German warrant officer ; I found him in the rest house for German and Austro-Hungarian troops. He promised to do what he could for our men . . . .

" *24th June.* We came to a spring and lying around it were three British soldiers . . . . All were horribly emaciated and in a dreadful state.

They told us that they had been left behind by a column that had passed about two days ago, as they could not march. They had nothing to eat from the Turks, but a German wireless section, that we had met, had given them some food. We took these men on our carts to bring along with us.

"On arriving at Hassan Begli I saw a German warrant officer talking to 24 British soldiers. He told me that they had been left here the night before by the party going out, as they were too ill to travel. He had seen the commandant several times and begged him to put them under shelter (they were lying by the road side) and to give them shelter and food; but each time the commandant gave an evasive reply and nothing was done. The General sent for the commandant and told him exactly what he thought of his behaviour. We now had 27 men on our hands. The commandant at once sent them into a large shed and sent down some rice and meat already cooked. The General sent me into the village to buy bread and eggs, which, thanks to the German, I got at very low prices. We brought these to the men and issued them out. The General told me to invite the German to breakfast. He was glad to come, as he had not met Europeans for so long. We had another interview with the commandant. The General told him that he must send on these 27 men by carts. He said he had no carts. The German said this was a lie. Finally, the commandant said our carts would go at 5 p.m. and at 6 p.m. the men should go with a convoy. But that did not suit the General, who said he would not stir till the men had been moved. The commandant then agreed to send them by carts and at about 5 p.m. we saw the men safely off . . . .

"*25th June.* We arrived at . . . . There we found the men we had sent on in carts the night before sitting down enjoying hot coffee, the gift of some Austrian soldiers. One of our men told me that this was the first hot drink he had had since he had been a prisoner.

"I went with the General to interview the German commandant (Major Schön). He was very amiable, sent for coffee for us and listened with great sympathy to my story of our suffering men. He told me that there were a large number of British and Indians here; at present they were under the Turks, but he hoped to take them over soon for railway work; then their conditions would improve . . . . ."

APPENDIX XXX.

Note on Military Intelligence in the Mesopotamia Campaign.

Intelligence methods in this campaign differed little in the main from those which military experience and usage have crystallised into a settled system for universal application.

Thus, the main sources of information in the Mesopotamia front may be categoried as follows :—

1. Statements elicited from prisoners of war and from deserters ; captured documents ;* the news of casual travellers ; and the reports of paid agents of various degrees of social standing.

The order in which these sources are quoted may be taken as a fair index of their respective reliability.

2. To look upon the Intelligence system from the wider standpoint of the war against Turkey as a nation, it may be briefly stated here that the work on all four fronts (i.e.,the Dardanelles and Gallipoli, Palestine, the Russian operations in Trans-Caucasia, and Mesopotamia including Persia) was co-ordinated, and intelligence freely interchanged throughout.

3. Returning to a consideration of intelligence conditions on the Mesopotamia front in greater detail, it may be stated that certain difficulties, probably more or less peculiar to the country and its inhabitants, were encountered. Thus, the main sources from which it might have been hoped to procure secret service agents might be considered to have been the Arab and the Jew. But the vagueness and unreliability of the former and the timidity of the latter (even under the temptation of rich reward) rendered both classes peculiarly unsatisfactory.

Nor was the Intelligence service at the outset of the campaign gratified by taking over a field well sown in peace time ; warfare in that region had not been contemplated in advance and no preliminary framework had, therefore, been laid : a want which manifested itself throughout the years that the war lasted.

Again, the kaleidoscopic activities of the Turkish Adjutant-General's Branch rendered the maintenance of an accurate enemy order of battle a matter of extreme difficulty ; regiments were continually being renumbered or merged into other units ; strengths of establishments constantly varied ; and the great difference in the fighting value of Arab and of Turkish personnel was misleading. Thus, at Ctesiphon, although the Turkish order of battle was foretold with almost complete accuracy (three and a half divisions predicted as against the three and two-thirds which were actually present at the battle), the strengths of the newly arrived formations were much in excess of those of their predecessors and the personnel of almost immeasurably greater individual value.

These factors considerably minimised, for instance, the value, as far as Mesopotamia was concerned, of the excellent handbook of the Turkish army compiled on the Egypt front in early 1915.

A difficulty which may be finally quoted as having been perhaps unusually prominent in this campaign was the peculiar nature of the terrain and the abnormal characteristics of the country, more particularly as regards the vagaries of the two great rivers and the difficulty of obtaining really reliable and illuminating forecasts of their habits at any particular season ; rendering, as they were apt to do, troop movements well nigh impracticable at one season by reason of their floods, and at another by reason of their emptiness.

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* Highly valuable factors as regards the timing of Turkish troops movements by rail, road and river from Constantinople to the Baghdad front were obtained from captured diaries.

4. No note on Military Intelligence in this campaign can be complete without a reference to the inestimable help rendered to the military system by the loyal and enthusiastic co-operation of the British political authorities, who were always at the forefront of affairs and eager to assist with their wide knowledge of the peoples and of their languages and characteristics.

Signed: W. H. BEACH,
Colonel.

India, 25th February, 1924.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN INDEX.

A.Q.M.G.	Assistant Quartermaster-General.
Bn.	Battalion.
C.G.S.I.	Chief of the General Staff, India
C.I.G.S.	Chief of the Imperial General Staff.
H.Q.	Headquarters.
I.A.	Indian Army.
I.E.F.	Indian Expeditionary Force.
I.O.	India Office.
M/G.	Machine gun.
M.G.O.	Master-General of the Ordnance.
R.F.C.	Royal Flying Corps.
R.I.M.	Royal Indian Marine.
R.N.A.S.	Royal Naval Air Service.
S. & M.	Sappers and Miners.
S. of S.	Secretary of State.
T.F.	Territorial Force.
W.O.	War Office.

Note.—For divisions, brigades, regiments, battalions, etc., *see under* "Artillery"; "Cavalry"; "Infantry."

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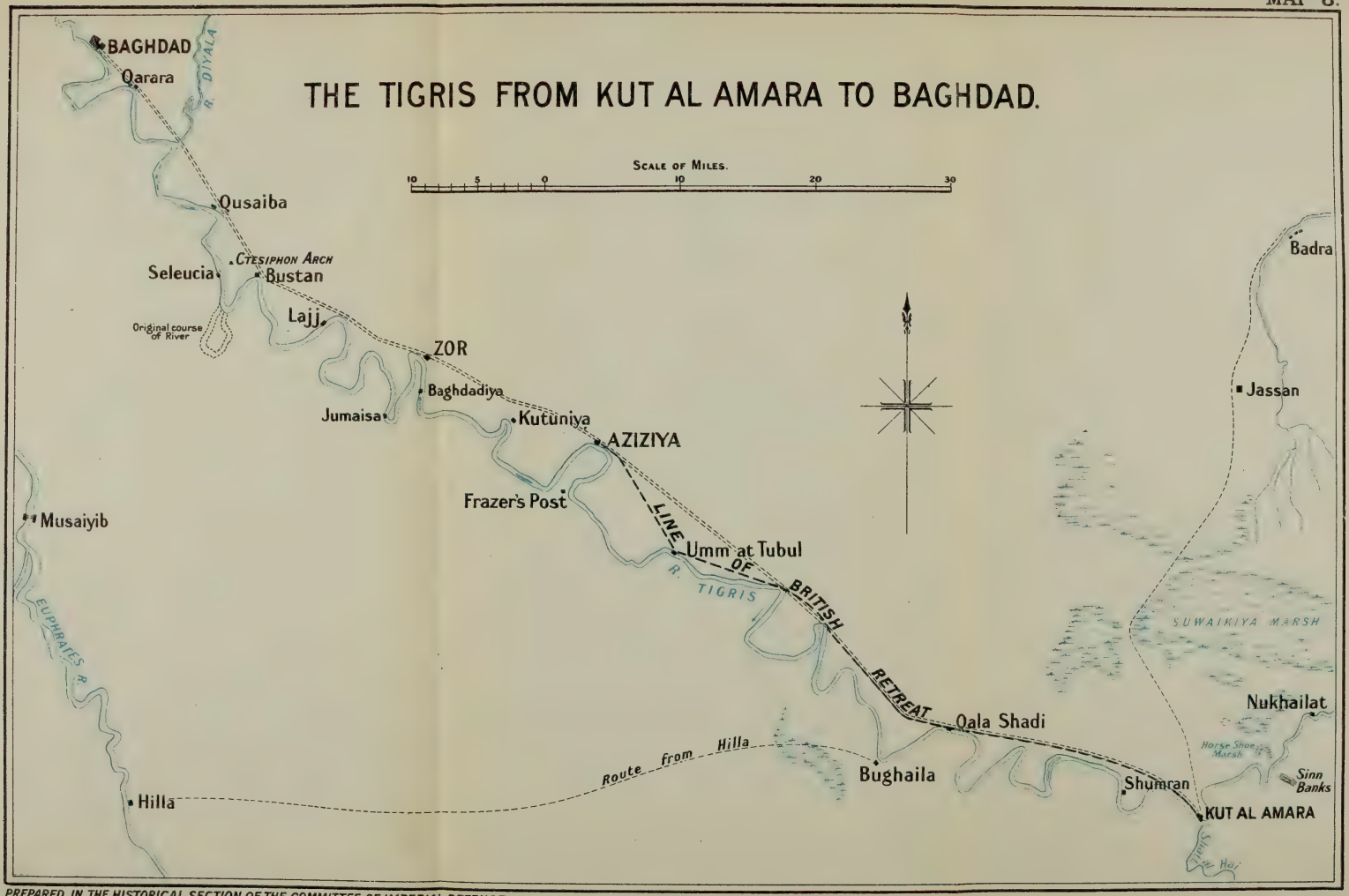

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TO ILLUSTRATE

THE DEFENCE OF KUT AL AMARA:

December 1915, to April 1916.

NOTE.

Before the advent of the Floods there was a network of subsidiary trenches and communication trenches in rear of the Turkish advanced line.

SCALE. 1¾ INCHES=1 MILE

YARDS 1000 500 0 1000 2000 3000 YARDS.

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MAP
TO ILLUSTRATE THE ACTION OF SHAIKH SAAD.
6th — 9th January, 1916.

TURKISH TRENCHES SHOWN IN GREEN.
TRENCHES IN EXISTENCE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE ACTION SHOWN THUS ——
TRENCHES DUG AFTER THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE ACTION SHOWN THUS ~~~

Scale: 1 Inch = 2 Miles.

MILE | ½ 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 MILES

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MAP
TO ILLUSTRATE THE ACTION OF THE WADI.

a = TURKISH POSITIONS ACCORDING TO BRITISH INFORMATION AT 10 P.M. 12TH JANUARY, 1916.

b = APPROXIMATE LINE OF HASTILY ENTRENCHED WATERCUTS HELD BY TURKS ON 13TH JANUARY, 1916, AGAINST THE ADVANCE OF THE BRITISH 7TH DIVISION.

APPROXIMATE POSITION OF BRITISH FRONTAL AND FLANKING ATTACKS DURING NIGHT 13TH/14TH JANUARY, 1916. SHOWN IN RED.

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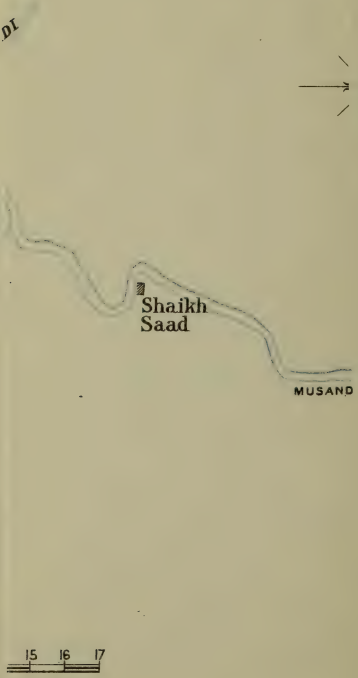
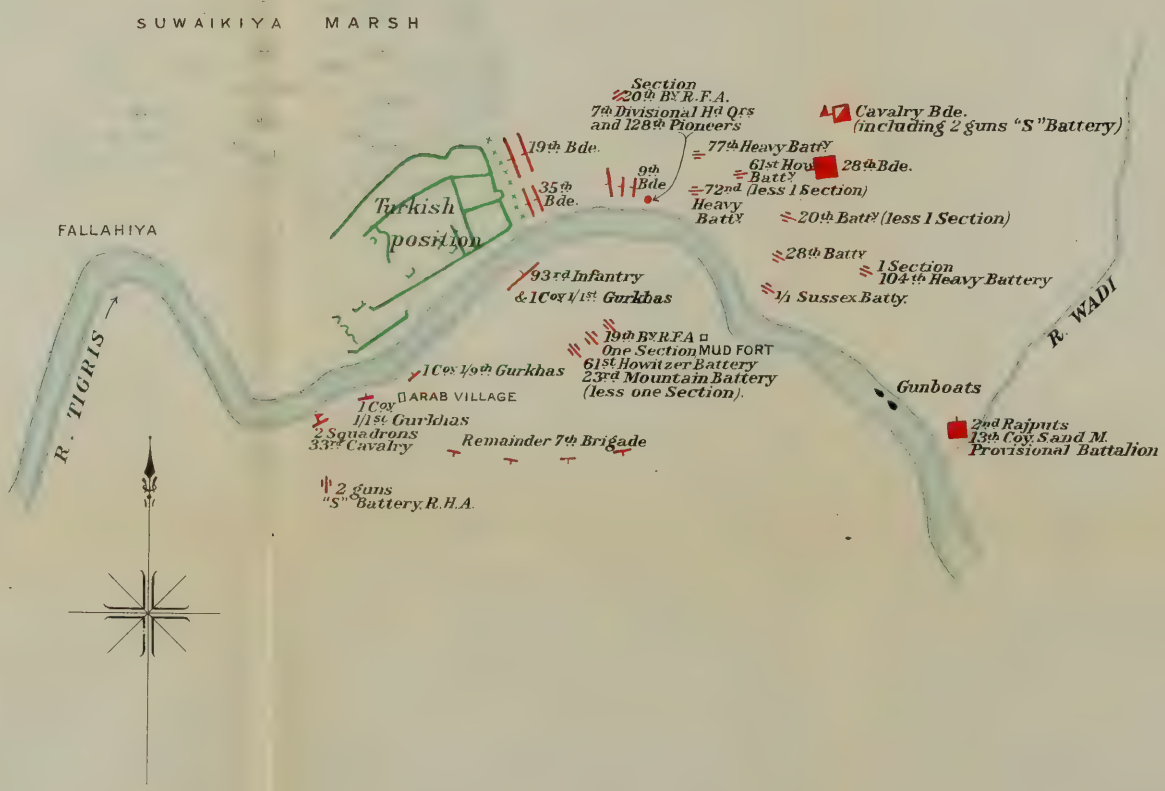
Ordnance Survey

SHUMRAN.



MAP
TO ILLUSTRATE THE FIRST ATTACK ON HANNA.
21st January, 1916.

SHOWING BRITISH DISPOSITIONS AT 7.40 A.M. IN RED.
TURKISH TRENCHES SHOWN IN GREEN.



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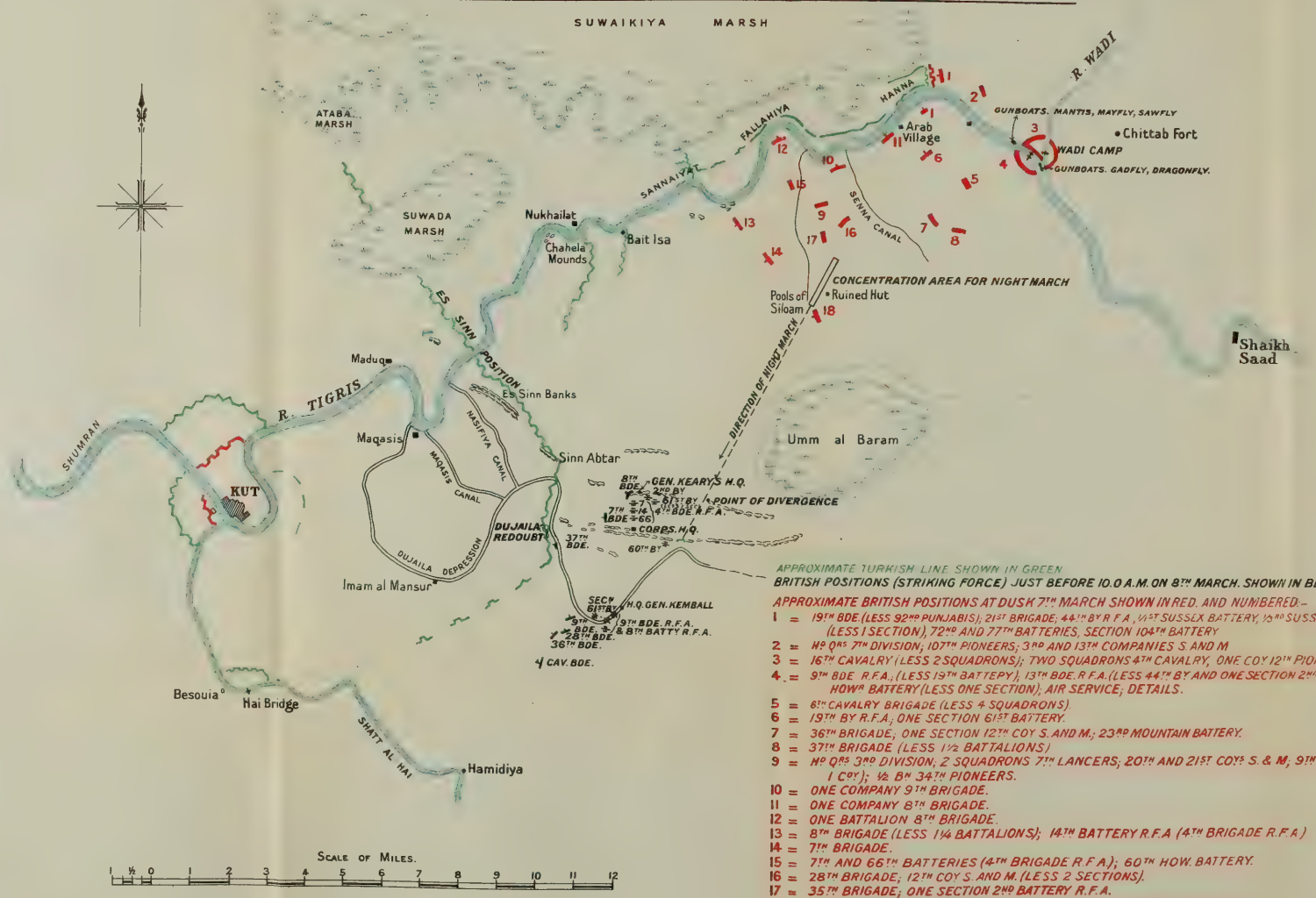
MAP TO ILLUSTRATE

THE ATTACK ON THE DUJAILA REDOUBT: 8TH MARCH, 1916.



APPROXIMATE TURKISH LINE SHOWN IN GREEN.

BRITISH POSITIONS (STRIKING FORCE) JUST BEFORE 10.0 A.M. ON 8TH MARCH. SHOWN IN BLACK.

APPROXIMATE BRITISH POSITIONS AT DUSK 7TH MARCH SHOWN IN RED. AND NUMBERED:–

1 = 19TH BDE. (LESS 92ND PUNJABIS); 21ST BRIGADE; 44TH BY R.F.A.; ½ 1ST SUSSEX BATTERY, ½ 3RD SUSSEX BATTERY (LESS 1 SECTION), 72ND AND 77TH BATTERIES, SECTION 104TH BATTERY.

2 = HQRS 7TH DIVISION; 107TH PIONEERS; 3RD AND 13TH COMPANIES S. AND M.

3 = 16TH CAVALRY (LESS 2 SQUADRONS); TWO SQUADRONS 4TH CAVALRY, ONE COY. 12TH PIONEERS, DETAILS.

4 = 9TH BDE. R.F.A. (LESS 19TH BATTERY), 13TH BDE. R.F.A. (LESS 44TH BY. AND ONE SECTION 2ND BATTERY, 61ST HOWR BATTERY (LESS ONE SECTION); AIR SERVICE; DETAILS.

5 = 6TH CAVALRY BRIGADE (LESS 4 SQUADRONS).

6 = 19TH BY R.F.A.; ONE SECTION 61ST BATTERY.

7 = 36TH BRIGADE, ONE SECTION 12TH COY S. AND M.; 23RD MOUNTAIN BATTERY.

8 = 37TH BRIGADE (LESS 1½ BATTALIONS).

9 = HQRS 3RD DIVISION; 2 SQUADRONS 7TH LANCERS; 20TH AND 21ST COYS S. & M; 9TH BRIGADE (LESS 1 COY); ½ BN 34TH PIONEERS.

10 = ONE COMPANY 9TH BRIGADE.

11 = ONE COMPANY 8TH BRIGADE.

12 = ONE BATTALION 8TH BRIGADE.

13 = 8TH BRIGADE (LESS 1¼ BATTALIONS); 14TH BATTERY R.F.A (4TH BRIGADE R.F.A.)

14 = 7TH BRIGADE.

15 = 7TH AND 66TH BATTERIES (4TH BRIGADE R.F.A.); 60TH HOW. BATTERY.

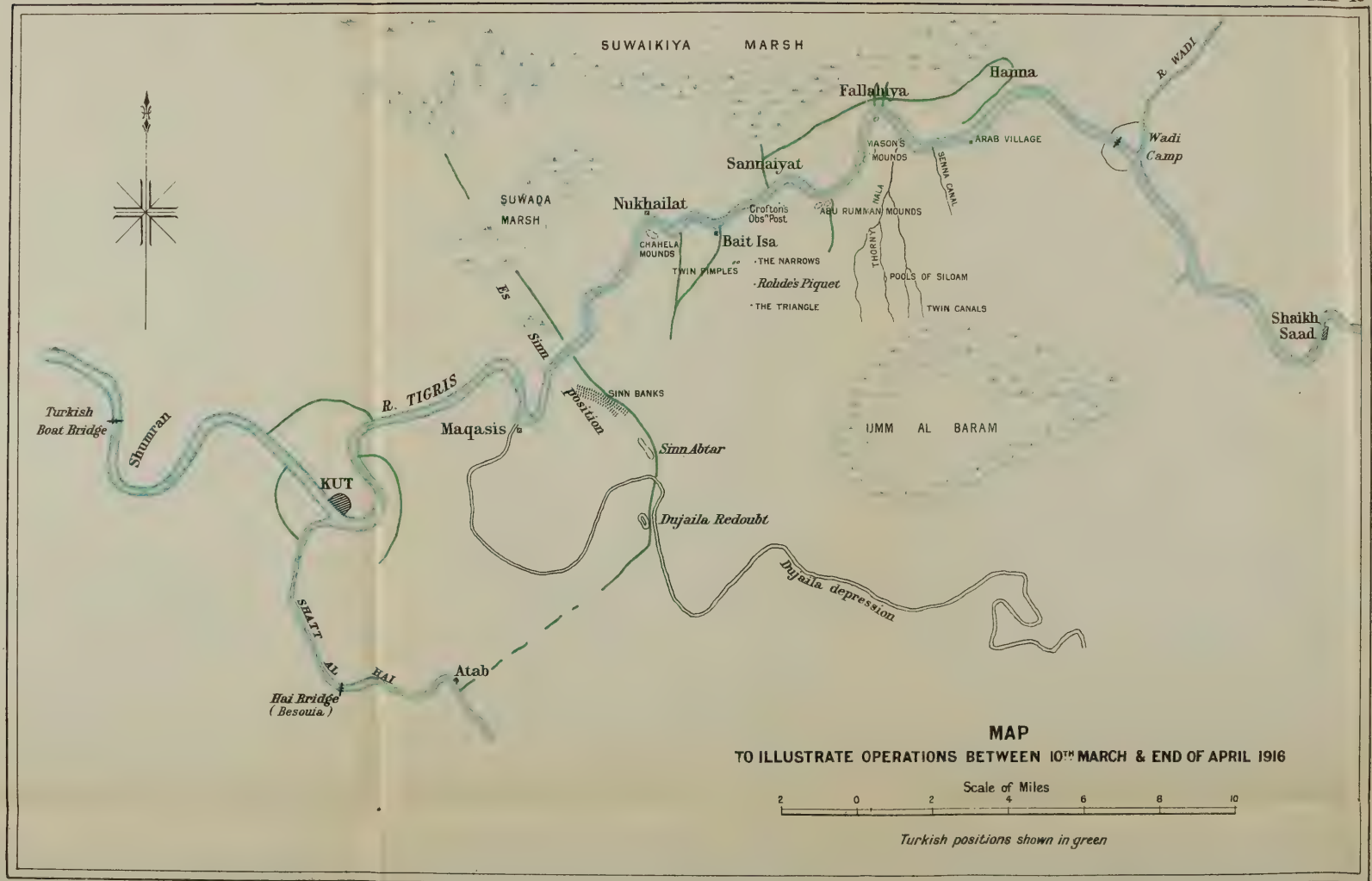
16 = 28TH BRIGADE; 12TH COY S. AND M. (LESS 2 SECTIONS).

17 = 35TH BRIGADE; ONE SECTION 2ND BATTERY R.F.A.

18 = BRIDGING TRAIN; 92ND PUNJABIS; ONE SECTION ½ 3RD SUSSEX BATTERY.

PREPARED IN THE HISTORICAL SECTION OF THE COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

Ordnance Survey 1924



MAP

TO ILLUSTRATE OPERATIONS BETWEEN 10TH MARCH & END OF APRIL 1916

Scale of Miles

2 0 2 4 6 8 10

Turkish positions shown in green

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Ordnance Survey 1924

MAP
TO ILLUSTRATE THE ACTION OF BAIT ISA ON 17TH & 18TH APRIL 1916
AND
THE ATTACK ON SANNAIYAT 22ND APRIL 1916

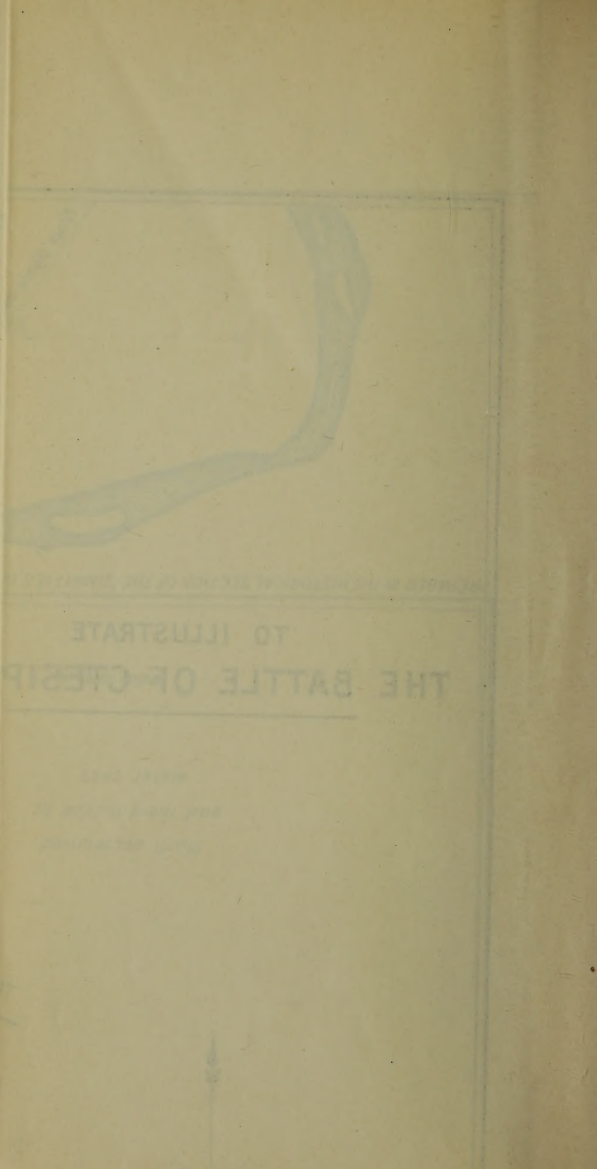
Scale 2" = 1 Mile

YARDS 500 0 1000 2000 3000 YARDS

Note: *British forward positions on right bank at dusk, 17th April shown in red*

PREPARED IN THE HISTORICAL SECTION OF THE COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE

Ordnance Survey, 1924.



D
568
.5
M6
v.2

Moberly, Frederick James (comp.)
The campaign in Mesopotamia

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